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LIVERPOOL FC



Official Liverpool FC Monthly Magazine

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KING OF THE KOP

MO SALAH ON THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE WITH LFC

CONTENTS

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"MY FAVOURITE PLAYER"

Sadio Mane scores all kinds of goals for Liverpool: the casual left-footed pass into the Everton net in the Anfield derby, the goal-line block-tackle against Man City in the FA Cup semi-final, and this deftest yet most lethal of headers at Aston Villa, after which former Reds star Jamie Carragher said on Sky Sports: "When I've watched Liverpool as a fan, Sadio Mane is my favourite player. There is just something about Mane. He's sacrificed himself at times and the shift he puts in. He, along with Salah, are there week in, week out for 90 minutes. What they have done for this football club is unbelievable."


KONSA
4



HE FEELS FINE

The highlights from Jürgen Klopp's exclusive interview with liverpoolfc.com on the day he signed his contract extension with LFC

JÜRGEN, IT'S A BIG DAY FOR YOU, IT'S A BIG DAY FOR LIVERPOOL FOOTBALL CLUB – HOW DO YOU FEEL?

Great! That's easy to say. I couldn't appreciate more what has happened in the last six-and-a-half, nearly seven years. I never thought I would find again a place where we feel that welcome and where I am maybe useful as well. It was just a very easy decision, let me say. A few things had to be sorted but not with the club actually.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS CLUB YOU LOVE? A LOT OF PEOPLE THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO LEAVE HERE IN 2024...

That is, of course, nothing to do with my love for the club. If, when I said around the last contract extension, that in 2024 that's it then, it was actually a private agreement and the most important contract in my life is the one with [my wife] Ulla. That's where it started again. We sat in the kitchen at the table and Ulla said, 'I can't see us leaving in 2024'. And I was like, 'What?!' 'No, really, [with] all the people about...'

When I thought about it then it was clear I needed to have one more really important conversation and that was with Pep Lijnders. He is probably the main reason for it because he is a real energiser – this man is on fire and our connection is beyond football things. When he said, 'Oh, yes, I am in!' then it was clear that we are open for any kind of talks.

IT'S NOT JUST PEP WHO HAS RECOMMITTED, IT'S PETE KRAWIETZ TOO – HOW IMPORTANT WAS THAT?

Ah, there is no doubt about that. Pete and I are like an old couple! I know Pete would have stayed, but with him it is the same – with family, the kids are in school, so these kinds of things we had to sort, of course. With Vitor [Matos] we have the next one with us who is an incredible coach.

We play three times a week pretty much every week, but we are still more often [than not] at the training ground and the group we built here, the coaching staff, is absolutely incredible. That makes it so enjoyable to come here. That's the reason why the energy thing is no issue anymore because we give each other a boost every day and working for this club is pretty special.

We all know there are more important things than football out there, but when you have the chance to work in football then I can't see a better place to be – that's the truth – for other people as well, so for players and these kinds of things. It is exciting. It's not that we now try to get through the next years – we feel like this is only the start and it's cool.

IT'S NOT JUST THE COACHING STAFF, IT'S EVERYONE MAKING THEIR OWN CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS THE TEAM...

Yes, it is. Look, we had one-and-a-half years here [at the AXA Training Centre]. We were a bit worried when we left Melwood because sometimes maybe when you move, you lose a bit of soul. You live in an old house and you know everything about it. Then you move into a new house, it is exciting but it's a bit cold and you're not sure. Here, not at all, because we brought all the people with us. The atmosphere created here again is second-to-none. It's really cool to be part of this family.

We work with the team of today but we have to create the team of tomorrow as well. With the team we have now, it is obviously a really good one and a really exciting one, but in the next four years there





is obviously a lot to do. It's not only that I love being here, but I feel massively responsible for everything here as well, so it's just part of the deal.

YOU'VE MENTIONED IN YOUR EARLIER ANSWERS, IT'S NOT JUST WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE PITCH...

This club is much more than on the pitch, we know that. I came from Dortmund and I was at Mainz – that's more than football as well, definitely. I was really, really blessed with the clubs I had, and I am again – that's so cool. I think I said it in the first press conference, what I love [is] how the people live football in Liverpool, and I had no idea how true that is. But in Liverpool it's obviously massive.

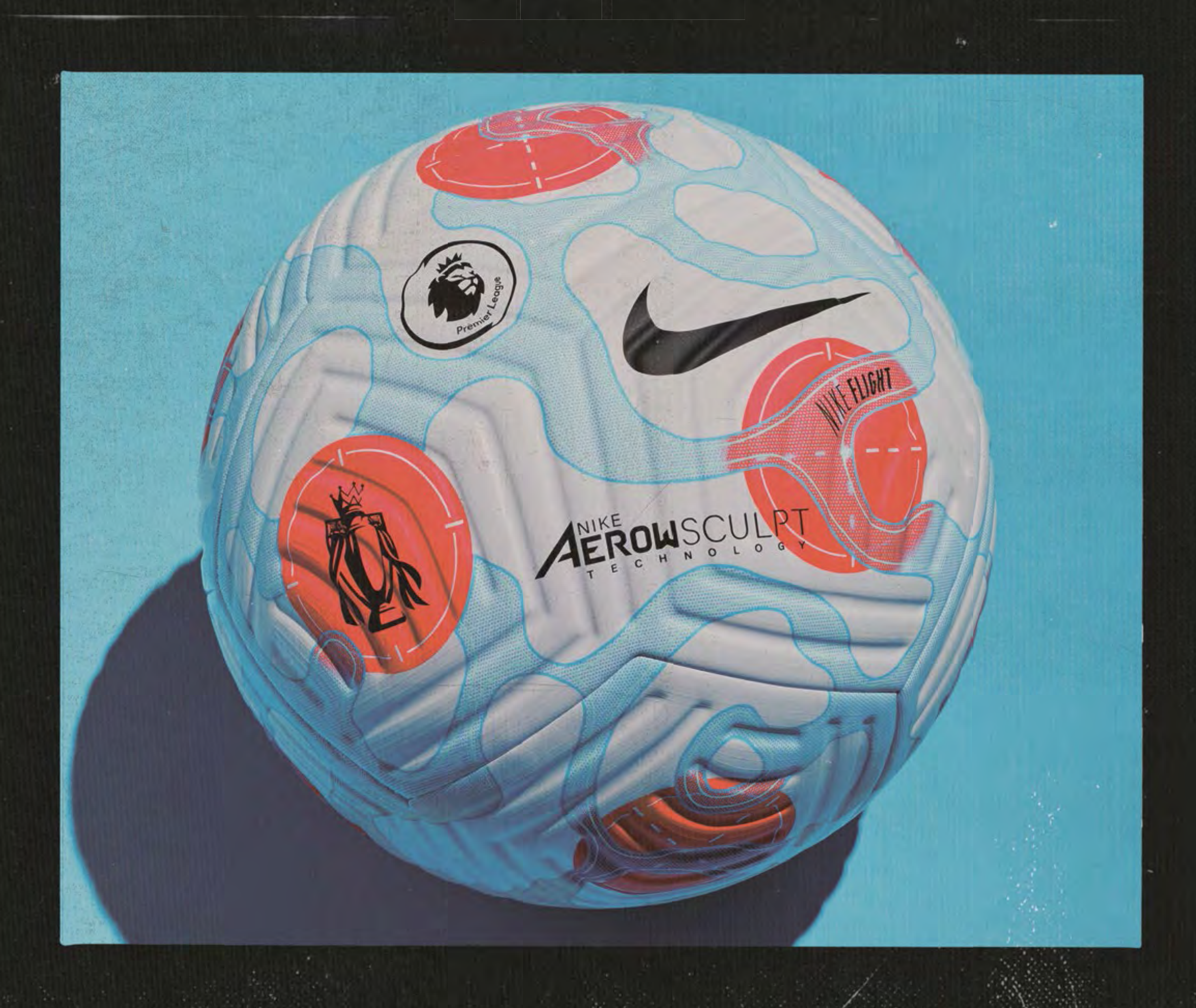
When this contract expires then, whenever it is, it will definitely be the longest time of my life in a football club as a coach at least. That's big. When I now hear it, it makes me proud as well – and I don't feel that often.

THE FANS' SENTIMENT IS THAT THIS IS THE TIME OF OUR LIVES – WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SUPPORTERS READING THIS INTERVIEW?

Hopefully not! Maybe the time of our lives comes, maybe it gets even better. But yes, it's a very good time. It's absolutely good to be a Red in the moment. I think we all know that, we all appreciate it and we all love it.



MEET THE NEW NIKE FLIGHT BALL





THEY BREWED UP A TITLE WIN BUT ARE LFC WOMEN HEADING TO THE TEA BAR AT THE DRIPPING PAN, LEWES?

CORNER TAKEN QUICKLY



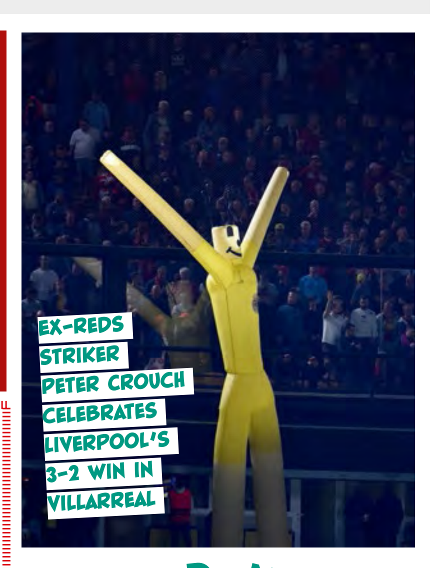
Just like Barcelona in 2019, the page where you don't know what to expect...

City Reds XI

Marcelo PitaLUGANO (Switzerland)
SAN JOSE Enrique (USA)
CALGARY Gillespie (Canada)
Martin SkTEL-AVIV (Israel)
Oyvind LEONhardsen (Spain)
Alex Oxlade-ChamBERLaIN (Germany)
ST LOUIS Bimpson (USA)
JeROME Sinclair (Italy)
Sean DUNDEE (Scotland)
MILAN Baros (Italy)
MILAN Jovanovic (still Italy)

OUR LADS HAVE COME FROM ALL OVER THE PLACE

Virgil van Dijk (Breda, Netherlands)



Breda is a city in the southern Netherlands province of North Brabant. The great thing about Breda is its situation. It's equidistant between Rotterdam and Antwerp. That's the genius of its location.

A fortified city of historical and strategic military importance since the 11th century, Breda's population rose from 30,000 in 1919 to 184,000 in 2019. It had the largest brewery in the Netherlands until 2004 and is home to the Dutch HQ of Perfetti Van Melle – the company who make Mentos. Bet they're minted!

Between 2007 and 2018, Breda hosted Redhead Day: a three-day festival attended by thousands of people, from over 80 countries, with naturally red hair. The festival, promoting the values of pride, connection and recognition, moved to nearby Tilburg in 2019 and will be held for the 15th time in August 2022.

Virgil van Dijk isn't a redhead, but he is a Red and was born in Breda in 1991. He also worked there, washing dishes in a local restaurant when he was 15 to earn some money while playing for Willem II Tilburg's Academy.

The only thing he cleans up now are cups. Big silver ones.

BAD NEWS FOR ANIME AND MANGA

"When I was younger I used to watch a lot, but now I have no time to watch cartoons."
Bobby Firmino

BLAGGING IT

Two of these facts about Liverpool's 1981 European Cup win against Real Madrid in Paris are true, the other est faux. Can you work it out?

- The cheapest tickets for European Cup final venue Parc des Princes cost £2, slightly more than the average price of a beer in Paris in 1981.
- Tottenham Hotspur FC were no5 in the UK charts with *Ossie's Dream* on the night Liverpool won their third European Cup.
- Captain Phil Thompson was given the bridal suite at the team hotel in Paris and woke up the following day with the European Cup in a four-poster bed.

Answer: Thommo may have slept with the European Cup, but he wasn't in a four-poster bed in a bridal suite! The cheapest of the 12,000 tickets Liverpool received were £2 with Parisian pints costing just less and Spurs' 1981 FA Cup final song was at no5 in the charts after Ossie Ardiles famously pronounced Tottenham as 'Tottingham,' while singing.

RANDOM CHANT OF THE MONTH

(to the tune of Under the Bridges of Paris)

How would you like to be,
a Scouser in Gay Paree?
Walking along on the banks of the Seine,
Winning the European Cup once again...

LFC's European final opponents

1 Real Madrid	3
2 AC Milan	2
3 Borussia Moenchengladbach	2
4 Club Brugge	2
5 Alaves	1
6 AS Roma	1
7 Borussia Dortmund	1
8 Juventus	1
9 Sevilla	1
10 Tottenham Hotspur	1



EX-REDS STRIKER PETER CROUCH CELEBRATES LIVERPOOL'S 3-2 WIN IN VILLARREAL

GOOD NEWS FOR DRIVE TO SURVIVE

"I watch a lot of Formula One. I like it. Verstappen...Max! It's nice."
Bobby Firmino



MO'S RED MARAUDERS

The world's best attacker right now looks back at the men who burst the net for Liverpool in previous eras

Nobody has scored more goals for Liverpool FC than Ian Rush with 346, but nobody had scored more than 30 goals in four seasons for Liverpool FC since Rushie until Mo Salah came along.

The Egyptian King admitted in a recent interview with FourFourTwo that he would love to one day break Rushie's record. "Hopefully before I go, I will be the first one," he said. "More than 300, it's quite tough to get. But let's see…"

And Liverpool's no11 has since now shared his thoughts on five ex-LFC strikers who scored 425 Premier League goals between them for the Redmen.

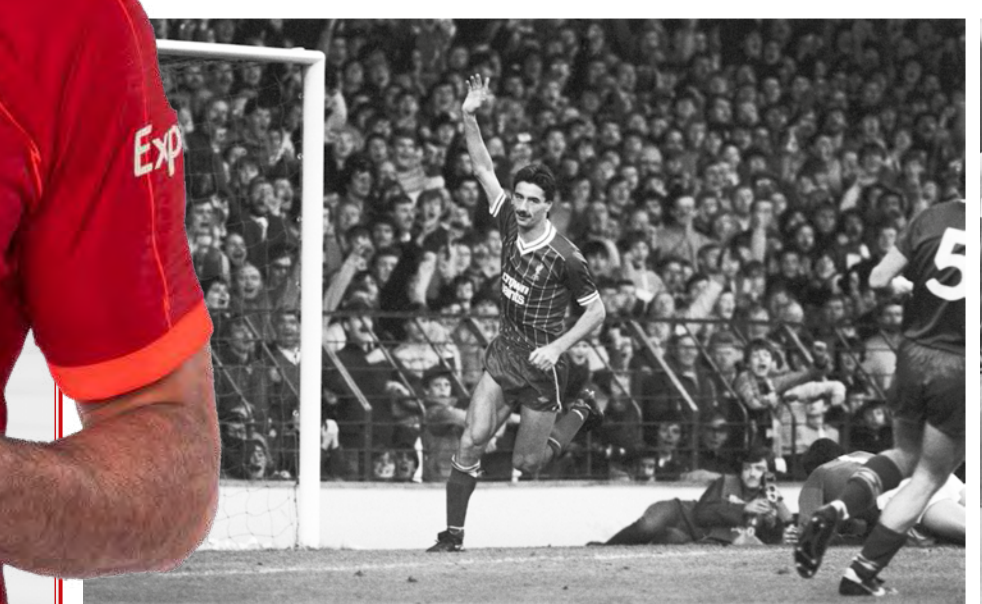
Read on to discover what Mo thinks of Ian Rush, Robbie Fowler, Michael Owen, Fernando Torres, Luis Suarez and their heir to their thrones…

IAN **RUSH**

APPEARANCES: **660**
GOALS: **346**
ASSISTS: **85**

"HIS FINISHING WAS UNBELIEVABLE"

"Ian is a great guy, we have a good relationship. We talk from time to time. I don't understand all of what he says because of his accent [laughs]! But he is a great guy and of course he is the number one top scorer for the club in history. I don't know how many games he was playing a season, but he scored too many goals! His finishing was unbelievable."







Words: Chris McLoughlin

MICHAEL **OWEN**

APPEARANCES: **297**

GOALS: **158**

ASSISTS: **41**

"A FANTASTIC STRIKER"

"I think we have scored a similar number of goals in all competitions. Michael started very early with the club and his career here was really good. I think in the Premier League he is in the top three for the most goals and a few goals ahead of me for scoring in the club's history! He was unbelievable, he won the Ballon d'Or here with the club and was a fantastic striker for the club and also for England. We also chatted the last time I saw him."

ROBBIE **FOWLER**

APPEARANCES: **369**

GOALS: **183**

ASSISTS: **49**

"A LEGEND HERE"

"I haven't talked much with Robbie, but when I see him at the game he is a nice person and he had a great career with this club. He is a legend here and I saw a goal he scored against Aston Villa that was unbelievable. The way he turned the centre-back and the way he was shooting was fantastic."







FERNANDO **TORRES**

APPEARANCES: **142**

GOALS: **81**

ASSISTS: **16**

"THE BEST IN THE WORLD"

"Torres was unbelievable. He is such a good person. We played together at Chelsea and I met him again when we played Atletico home and away. He is a really nice person and is a good coach now with Atletico's youth team. He was a top scorer for the club here, had an unbelievable career here and I think he was the best in the world at that time."





LUIS **SUAREZ**

APPEARANCES: **133**

GOALS: **82**

ASSISTS: **29**

"THE FANS LOVED HIM"

"The funny thing is that the physio guys always try to compare his season [in 2013/14] with my first season at the club. They always try to say 'his season was better than yours' and I always say my season was better! He didn't score for a few games and I always scored in every game! I try to put Hendo into this conversation and Hendo doesn't say which one, but we always have fun with this.

"Back to Suarez, he was incredible in his three or four years here and scored many goals for the club. When he left for Barcelona he also scored a lot of goals and has been a top striker here, in Barcelona and also at Atletico. The fans here, I'm sure they loved him and he did great here."




30


MIKEL
12


Stake
betway
M.SALAH
11

MO SALAH



"A GREAT FEELING"

APPEARANCES: **251**

GOALS: **155**

ASSISTS: **58**

"It is a great feeling [to be compared to LFC's top scorers] and I've worked really hard for that. I'm pleased to be in this situation, but I need to carry on, enjoy the moment and give my best for the club. Every season I try to score goals and win trophies with the team. Sometimes we've been lucky, sometimes not, but I'm trying always to help the team to win trophies. Hopefully it continues like this."

DOING THE

Home and away wins against both Everton and Manchester United in one season don't come along very often… in fact this is only the second time ever in Liverpool FC's long illustrious history



DOUBLE DOUBLE



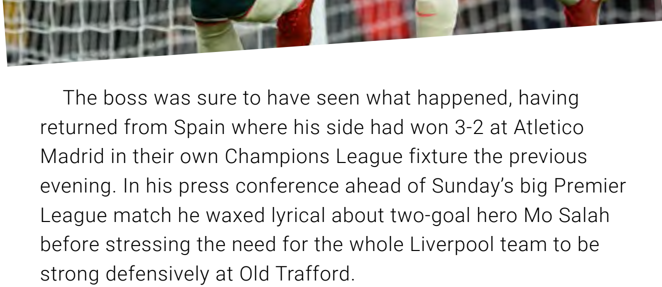
MAN UNITED 0 LIVERPOOL 5

Paul Scholes had called it right earlier in the week. After watching Manchester United come back from two-down at home to Atalanta to win 3-2 in the group stage of the UEFA Champions League in mid-October, the BT Sport pundit and former Red Devils midfielder reflected: "People are going to say I'm miserable but I looked at that game thinking about Liverpool on Sunday.

"Maybe it's the wrong thing to do. Because I thought in that first half United were all over the place. They had the two midfielders playing on their own. Now if you do that against Manchester City or Liverpool, half-time it'll be three or four-nil. You'll be out of the game, you're not coming back…

"Everyone's smiling [now], everyone's happy. Go and do that on Sunday against Liverpool and see what happens.

"Imagine Jürgen Klopp at home watching that game in the first half, rubbing his hands together."



The boss was sure to have seen what happened, having returned from Spain where his side had won 3-2 at Atletico Madrid in their own Champions League fixture the previous evening. In his press conference ahead of Sunday's big Premier League match he waxed lyrical about two-goal hero Mo Salah before stressing the need for the whole Liverpool team to be strong defensively at Old Trafford.

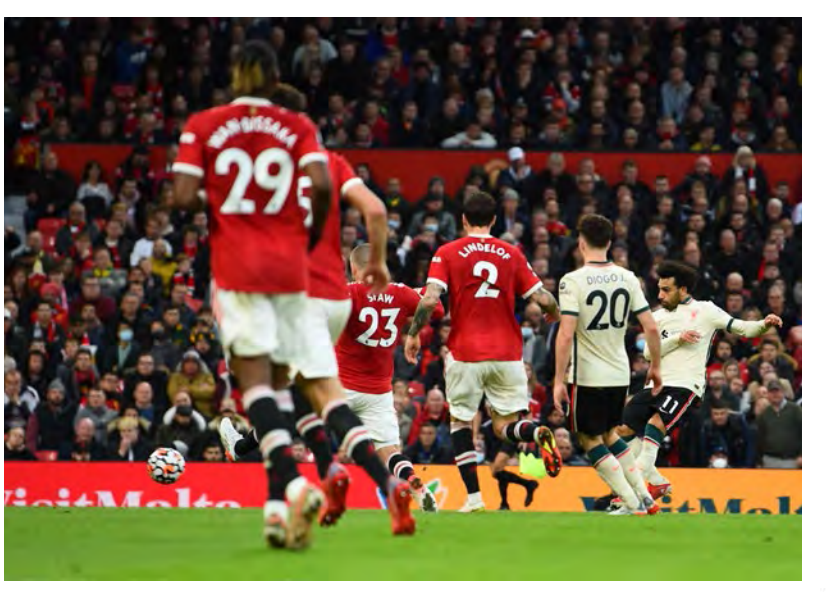


"I said it a couple of times and it's the truth, I'm blessed with incredible players that I've worked together with. But if you don't defend well against United, the quality they have offensively is absolutely ridiculous. I really don't think it's very likely that you score three goals at United, but before a game we never think about scoring more than defending.

"So for us, it's 100 per cent clear that to stay in a game and to win a game, you have to defend on your absolute highest level. We have to focus on that but we have to create as well. We have to play football – very important – and we have to be incredibly brave."

His players responded in style – and then some. As Scholes had predicted, they were four up by half-time. Naby Keita opened the scoring after the ball was worked through United's lines via Andy Robertson, Diogo Jota, Roberto Firmino then Salah, who slipped the Guinean midfielder through on goal to finish coolly.


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Diogo Jota doubled the lead when he slid in to convert Trent Alexander-Arnold's low cross, before Salah netted twice with first-time finishes, right foot then left, from assists by Keita and Jota. After the break he completed his hat-trick from a sublime Jordan Henderson pass. In doing so Salah became the first away player to fire a Premier League hat-trick at Old Trafford.

"This group always wanted to write their own little chapters for the big, big history book of this club," said Klopp after recording his 200th win as LFC boss. "This one was a little one tonight, a little chapter."

For the record, it was Liverpool's biggest-ever away win versus United, indeed their biggest win over United anywhere since 1925. Former Reds defender Jamie Carragher said on Sky Sports: "We have seen a team versus individuals and that is the huge difference. Liverpool fans, you are watching the best of times, world-class players, stars and a special manager. But Manchester United are an absolute mess."

His pundit partner-in-crime and ex-United hero Gary Neville said simply: "This is as bad as it gets."

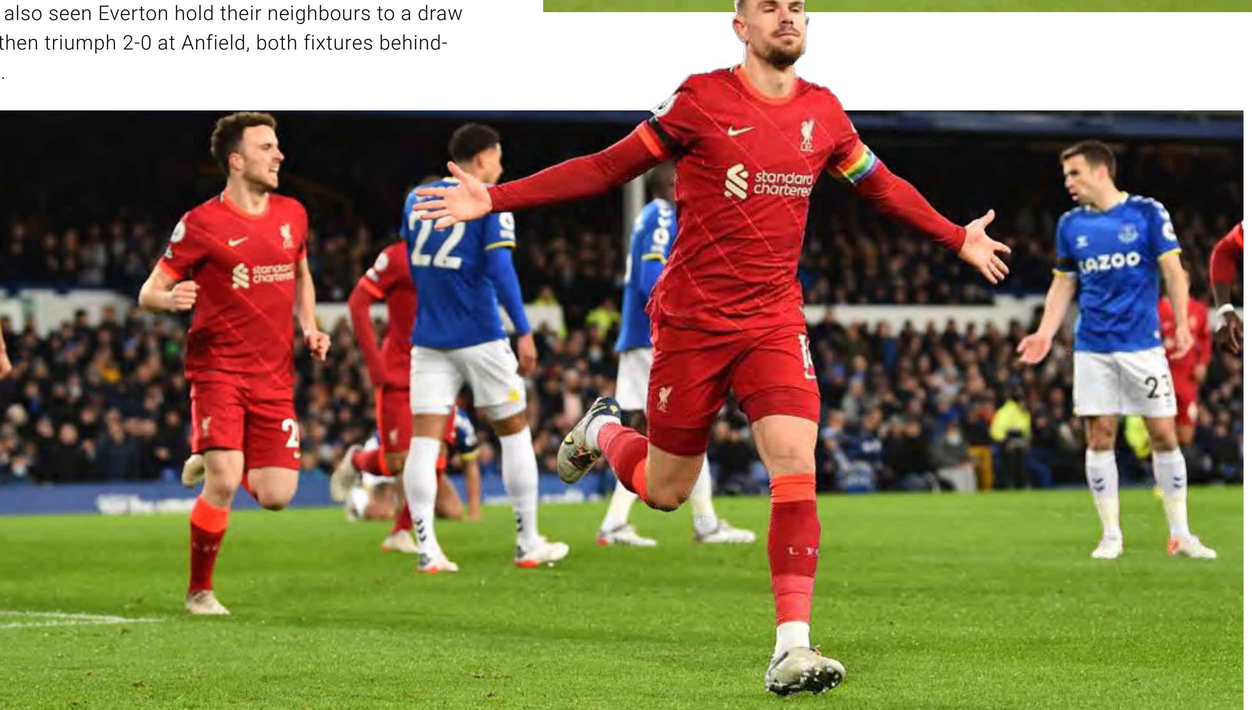


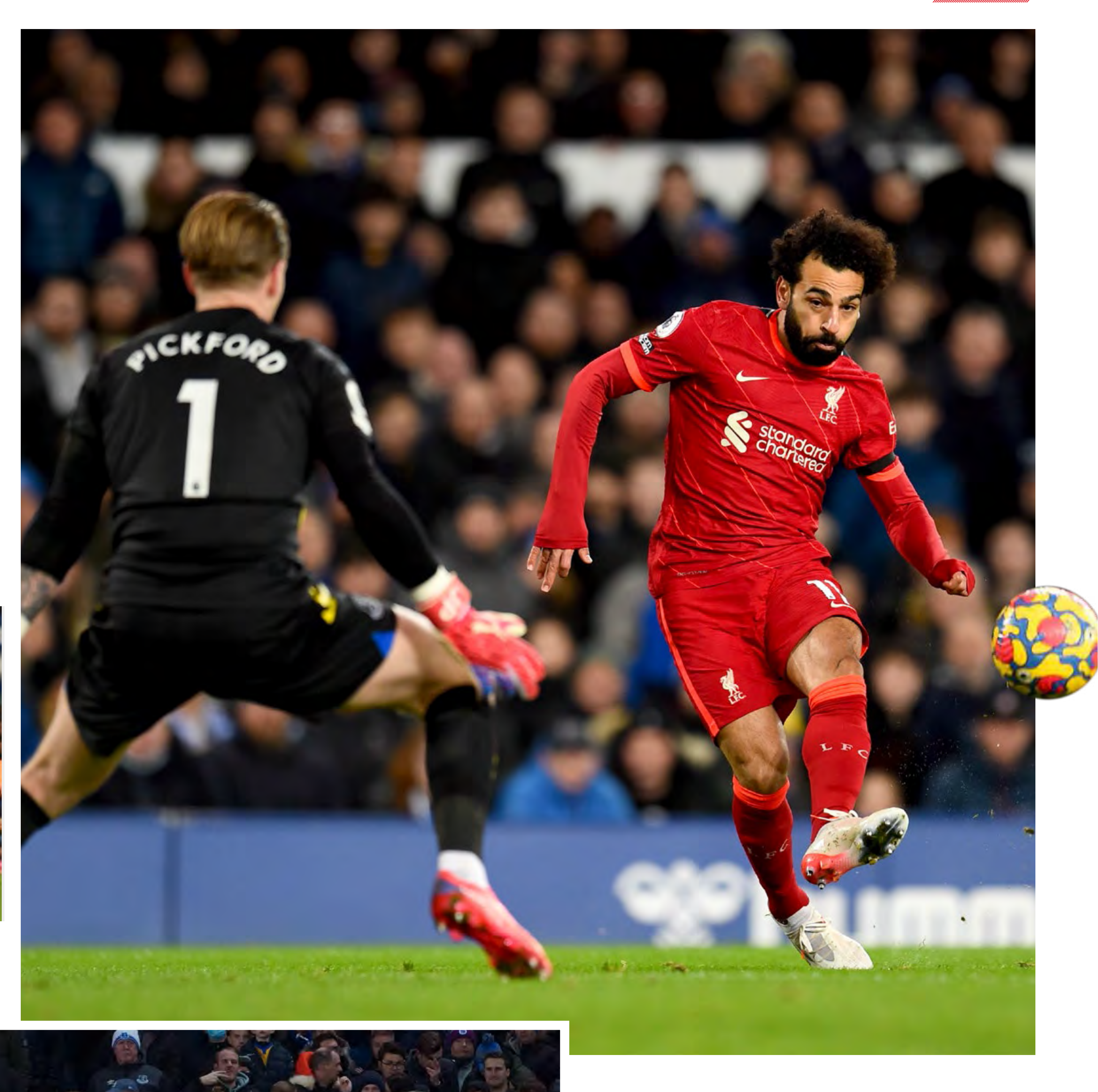


EVERTON 1 LIVERPOOL 4

This was a massive night not just for those oft-repeated local bragging rights but also for title-chasing credibility. On the same Wednesday 1 December, leaders Manchester City and second-placed Chelsea both won 2-1 away, at Aston Villa and Watford respectively, so the Reds simply had to win at Goodison Park to stay in touch after 14 rounds of the Premier League season. They did so in style.

Everton had not beaten Liverpool at home in ten previous attempts, but the Reds had won only once in nine visits. Season 2020/21 had also seen Everton hold their neighbours to a draw at Goodison then triumph 2-0 at Anfield, both fixtures behind-closed-doors.





After a difficult start to his tenure as manager, Rafael Benitez was hoping to use the occasion against his former club to kick-start Everton's season: "A derby is always special in every country, but here the passion is massive – I live in the city so I know exactly. For us as a team it's really important to bring back the confidence."

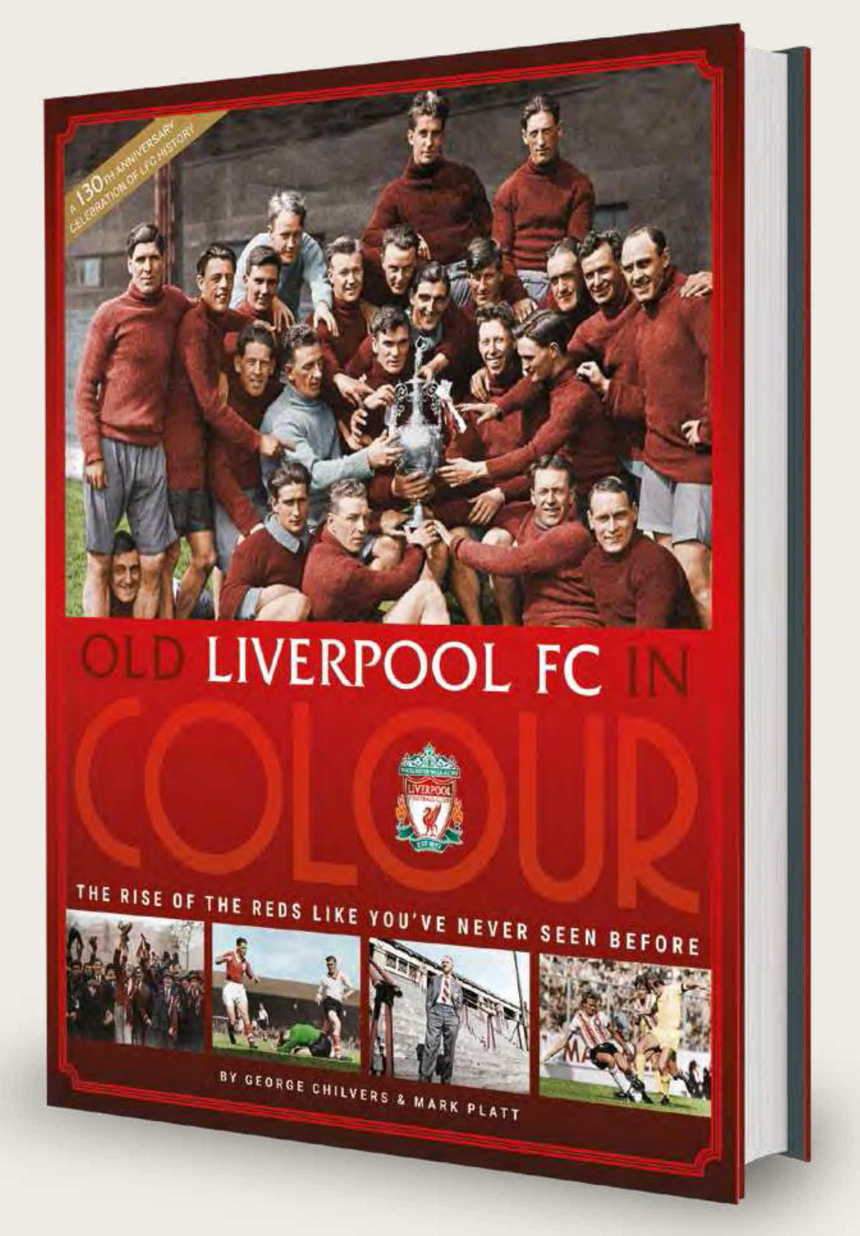
Jürgen Klopp was asked if he was enjoying Liverpool's form – they'd scored at least twice in each of their last 17 games in all competitions – and whether his side would carry it into the derby.

"I think previous form matters, especially when it's good. We play good football. We have to play good football tomorrow night. If we do that then we are difficult to play against. But I can enjoy football games when I watch them back, if we win. During the game I'm not really in the mindset for that."

The pre-match chatter was also about Mo Salah, who'd come

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an eyebrow-raising seventh in the voting for the Ballon d'Or awards earlier in the week, and once again he'd show what a world-class performer – the best of the best – he was.

Skipper Jordan Henderson scored first in a blistering Liverpool start, finding the net brilliantly with his left foot in the ninth minute before setting Salah clear to beat Jordan Pickford ten minutes later.

Everton gave themselves hope when Demarai Gray beat Alisson seven minutes before the break, but Salah restored his side's two-goal cushion by capitalising on Seamus Coleman's error to race clear and poke home after 64 minutes. It was left for Diogo Jota to deliver an emphatic ending with a powerful left-footed drive inside Pickford's near-post.

Liverpool had now scored 43 league goals at this point in the season, more than any other side in Europe's big five leagues. It was also their biggest league win at Everton since the famous 5-0 of November 1982.

Klopp reflected afterwards: "It was a really good game from my team, a really mature performance, grown-up performance, much





better than in years before, especially at Goodison. We were much too open when we gave away the goal but it can happen when you are superior. We should have been one or two-nil up before we scored the first goal."

On Salah he said: "He was angry after the game! He wanted to score the third one. I don't take these things for granted. His second goal, you have to force these kinds of mistakes. Mo put Coleman under pressure to win that ball and from then on it is a good chance he will score.

"We have momentum but it was by far the best performance since I've been at Liverpool at Goodison. Before the game people told me that in derbies form or shape doesn't count, [but] I see it totally different."







LIVERPOOL 4 MAN UNITED 0

Kopites were quietly confident before this one. But it was still Liverpool versus Manchester United, historically the biggest fixture of the season for both clubs regardless of their respective situations, and anything might just possibly happen.

"There may be times when one of these two sides has a bad result in this fixture," wrote captain Jordan Henderson in his matchday programme column, "but anyone who thinks these games are ever easy is kidding themselves. They are anything but.

"Every goal scored and every point gained has to be earned. Anyone who is lucky enough to be involved is totally aware that they are representing their club and their city in one of football's great rivalries. When you know something like this, you have no option but to give your all and this is why the competition between our two clubs is so strong.

"We had a great result at Old Trafford earlier this season, but we know it will count for nothing tonight. We will be starting



at nil-nil with everything to play for and in the knowledge that United will want to put things right. They have their own aims and objectives for the rest of the season and I've no doubt that one of them will be to get a good result of their own at Anfield. So we have to be ready for that.

"The other thing we need to do is enjoy it. I can't overstate how important this is. Yes, the stakes are high, and yes, there is pressure and tension in every game. But we have to embrace that because this is what all of us are in football for, whether we are players or supporters. This really is about enjoying the ride and seeing where it takes us."

And what a ride it was throughout April, this game coming three days after Liverpool's 3-2 win over Manchester City in the FA Cup semi-final at Wembley and five before the visit of Everton.

Luis Diaz struck first from Mo Salah's low cross before both sets of fans spent the seventh minute applauding in support of Cristiano Ronaldo following the tragic death of his baby son. Then Mo made it 2-0 as a ten-man, 25-pass move ended with a magical Mane reverse-pass sending him through to score.

In the second half the Reds got their third when Andy Robertson and Diaz combined to set up Mane, who swept home on his left foot. Then substitute Diogo Jota created Salah's 30th goal of the season, in front of the Kop.

"The second goal was outstanding, how we created that between Sadio and Mo," said Klopp as the Reds set a new seasonal record 9-0 aggregate win over United. "We could have





scored more, but it was a good night for all with a Liverpool heart."

Once again Paul Scholes was on punditry duties, this time in the company of Michael Owen and Steve McManaman, and one player stood out for the former United man.

"You look at Thiago, he's completely dictating the play. He's taking the mickey almost. He's not doing that on purpose – that's just the way he plays football, he's brilliant at it. He's done this for years and years, under Pep Guardiola at Barcelona, at Bayern Munich. He's doing it now for Liverpool.

"Have [United] not seen him? Have you not seen the strength of this team? Coming to Anfield is all about stopping them. Forget about what you do, you're never going to play brilliant football and create loads of chances – you've got to come and stop them.

"You've got to stop the crowd and you've got to stop their most dangerous players, and there was just never a plan to do that."

For the record, only once before had Liverpool faced United and then Everton in consecutive encounters in the league at Anfield. That happened way back in September 1925, when a 5-0 victory over United was followed by a 5-1 win against the neighbours, both in front of the Kop.




L.F.C.
standard
chartered
26



LIVERPOOL 2 EVERTON 0

As it transpired, Everton performed exactly how Paul Scholes had wanted United to play: fully intent on stopping Liverpool at almost all costs. But it wasn't enough to prevent the Reds recording another home-and-away double over one of their fiercest rivals in what was the 240th Merseyside derby.

In the LFC matchday programme, local boy Trent Alexander-Arnold discussed what the match meant growing up in the city. "It was always one of the biggest fixtures that you could have. There was not always a big gap between the two teams and it was always a very important game.

"In that week leading up to it in school, half would be Liverpool and half would be Everton. Me and my brothers would join in and we'd try to recreate the games on the playground. There was always excitement and a lot of passion around it."

Fellow full-back Andy Robertson said: "You know when the derby's round the corner when you bump into people in the street and they always mention trying to beat Everton! If you bump into











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Everton fans they're polite but always say they hope that they get the three points too, which is fair enough.

"In the week leading up to it, everyone in the city's talking about it. Since I came to Liverpool I've realised that quite a lot of families are split and that's not the way up in Glasgow where you're either one or the other. Down here it can cause family tension but it's all good banter.

"Of course, any time you play a derby, you just want the red side to be happy."

Which it was, eventually, thanks to Robbo's close-range header at the Kop-end which finally broke the deadlock an hour into a fractious contest. The hosts were frustrated by Everton's tactical approach, but the arrivals of substitutes Luis Diaz, Divock Origi and Jordan Henderson proved decisive.

With his first touch Origi combined with Mo Salah to cross for the opener. Then Henderson's ball to the far-post was sent back across goal by a Diaz bicycle-kick for Origi to power home his sixth goal against the Blues.

The Kop cult hero had now scored eleven goals as a substitute for Liverpool in the Premier League – the most of any player for the Reds, overtaking Daniel Sturridge on ten.

In his subsequent programme notes for the visit of Villarreal in the Champions League semi-final, Jürgen Klopp picked out the forward for "special appreciation. His performance on Sunday in the derby was top-drawer. But it's exactly what we expected. He trains each day to the highest level. He is in the best shape I have ever seen him in."

One stat stood out: Liverpool recorded a possession figure of 82.7 per cent; only Manchester City (83 per cent v Swansea in April 2018) had managed a higher such figure in a Premier League game since Opta started collecting this data in 2003/04.

Former Liverpool captain Graeme Souness told Sky Sports: "It was the easiest way to play for Everton. They didn't ask the players to step up and play football, everyone was back in their own half. The only threat they had was Anthony Gordon in a race





THE LAST TIME: 2000/01...





In late October 2000 the Reds recorded a 3-1 win over Everton at Anfield with Toffees old boy Nick Barmby on target for the first goal, followed by second-half strikes from Emile Heskey and Patrik Berger (from the penalty spot). Six weeks later Liverpool travelled to Old Trafford and pulled off a 1-0 victory courtesy of a trademark Danny Murphy free-kick.



with Trent Alexander-Arnold down the left. I'm not pooh-poohing their attitude – it was just about sitting in and trying to nick it."

The result made it 12 consecutive league wins at Anfield for Liverpool, who had won more points (38) and kept more clean-sheets (ten) than any other team in the Premier League in 2022 and remained the only unbeaten side in the division in the calendar year.

And, as we mentioned at the start, there was the little matter of completing a 'double double' in the league over the Red Devils and the Blues for the first time in over 20 years.







The following March local lads Steven Gerrard and Robbie Fowler scored and assisted each other in a 2-0 triumph for Liverpool over United at Anfield, and April brought more derby joy with a 3-2 scoreline at Goodison Park, memorable for Gary McAllister's last-minute winner from a free-kick after Heskey and Markus Babbel had netted earlier.

DREAMING is FREE

While the goals go in at the other end,
Reds no1 Alisson is focused on keeping them out so the
fans can keep believing that anything is possible

Words: William Hughes


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Every successful team needs a top-class goalkeeper capable of producing big saves in important games. One such moment on Alisson Becker's 2021/22 highlights reel will be the stop he produced from his compatriot Gabriel Jesus with 20 minutes left of the FA Cup semi-final against Manchester City at Wembley.

City midfielders Bernardo Silva and Jack Grealish combined to set Jesus racing in on goal and, for a split-second, time stood still for Reds supporters.

Their team had done the seemingly impossible during the first half and dominated Pep Guardiola's side to such an extent that they took a 3-0 lead with them into the interval.

But City had responded with a goal from Grealish inside a couple of minutes of the restart and Jesus had the opportunity to leave Liverpool with a nervy final quarter of the game should he have reduced his side's arrears to a single goal.

While Reds fans held their breath, Alisson – as has become his trademark – remained calm and composed. He stood his ground and denied his Brazilian international team-mate with a crucial stop, another in the catalogue of those big saves in big fixtures that mark him out as one of the best in the business.



FOOTBALL IS ABOUT CREATING MEMORIES, AND IT'S FANTASTIC WHEN YOU CAN ACHIEVE YOUR TARGETS AND WIN TROPHIES. IT'S WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO DO EVERY DAY BY PREPARING OURSELVES TO BE THE BEST WE CAN

This magazine went to press just before the FA Cup final with Chelsea and Alisson's contribution was key in sending his side through to the second of their three cup final appearances in this incredible season.

"It was a good moment," he told this magazine at Wembley post-match. "I am always happy when I can help the team and I was happy to show my hand as if we had conceded a second goal at that moment it would have given them a way back into the game.

"Conceding the second goal on ninety or so minutes was still hard for us as we were playing against a great side. In the end, though, we managed to get the result and I am very happy about that.

"We respect Man City and we know how hard it is to beat them. We did a good performance and we grew and improved from the last match that we played against them in the Premier League [six days earlier] and that gives us confidence."

Liverpool's 3-2 victory over City saw them into a first FA Cup final for a decade and also gave the Reds the chance to lift their eighth FA Cup and 50th major trophy of their near 130-year history.

Alisson continues: "Football is about creating memories, and it's fantastic when you can achieve your targets and win trophies. It's what we are trying to do every day [by] preparing ourselves to be the best as possible, the best we can be on the pitch for this great club. We are really focused on that."

The victory over Villarreal in the semi-final of the UEFA Champions League ensured the Reds would stay in the hunt for every honour available to them until at least mid-May, a remarkable achievement whatever the outcome.







Media talk has inevitably centred around talk of an unprecedented quadruple, something manager Jürgen Klopp has insisted is impossible given the relentless nature of a schedule that sees his squad playing every three or four days.

Liverpool's no1 says such talk does not distract this special group of players and, like the manager, he also feels it is important that supporters have their dreams and songs to sing.

On their 1979 hit *Dreaming*, the American new-wave band Blondie sang, 'Dreaming is free'. "Isn't that great?" pondered singer Debbie Harry as she performed the track at the M&S Bank Arena in Liverpool at the start of May this year. It is a notion Alisson believes Liverpool fans can embrace heading into the final few weeks of what could prove to be an historic campaign.

"Dreaming is for free and we are allowed to dream," he continues. "But we will keep our feet on the ground and our focus is just on our next challenge and whatever the next game is.

"We will try to keep going with so many games in a short space of time. It's a tough moment but it's a moment that we want to be in. To be playing for all the competitions at this important part of the season is what everyone wants.

"Is it hard to shut out the talk about the quadruple? No, because we are doing that already. They [the media] can speak about that and it is not a problem at all for us because we are just so focused on our performances, what we can do and what we need to do."

Rewind 12 months and Liverpool were battling hard to qualify for the Champions League, so stretched was the squad with a succession of injuries. A year on and the Reds found themselves heading into the final month of the season with a mostly-fit group and a bench-strength on a par with any of their rivals.

"It is amazing when you look and see the options that we have," says Alisson, who played his 175th game for the Reds in last month's Merseyside derby. "This season we are so blessed to have the possibility to count on the great players that we have in our group.

"All the players perform so well and they are so focused. The competition between us is a healthy one and that just brings





up the level of the squad. Having a strong squad can make the difference in football; when you have options to change players but keep at the same level as you have been performing.

"That was the case in the FA Cup semi-final and we showed it also in the second leg of the Champions League quarter-final against Benfica with seven different players in respect to those who had started the previous game, away to Man City in the league. This shows how strong our team can be when you can count on all these players."

That strength will certainly have been tested during the final two months of the season. Liverpool's dramatic victory over Villarreal to reach the final of the Champions League against Real Madrid in Paris on 28 May means they will play in all 63 games they could have possibly have done so, when the fixture programme was released last summer.

That tally will have included 15 – almost a quarter of the overall schedule – during the 'business end' of the season during April and May.

Alisson stresses that he finds the best way of dealing with such a punishing itinerary is simply not to look too far ahead.

"Obviously I look at the schedule and I know who we will be playing the following weekend, for instance, but in terms of preparation I just make sure that I will be ready for the game that's coming next. This is all that is in my mind until that day."

The first fortnight of May brought the second leg of that Champions League semi with Villarreal, Premier League games against Tottenham and Aston Villa and then the FA Cup final with Chelsea.

"We need this kind of thing," insists the keeper. "To always be really ready to face the next challenge whether that's Premier League, FA Cup or Champions League. It's both a hunger and a focus on the opponent because we are at a certain level now.

"We set ourselves as being among the best teams in the world right now because of the things that we have achieved in the last few years. But now we want more.

"You want to do everything again. We want to keep winning titles, but to do that you need to do even more than you have been doing. So we want to set our level higher."

The Brazilian, now in his fourth season at Anfield, believes the squad are being helped in that aim by a combination of the backroom staff and the strong spirit and sense of togetherness within the playing group.

"I believe it is a mix. Obviously the boss is someone who is so important for us and he keeps everybody with their feet on the ground and reminds us that we depend on this kind of mentality.

THE PLAYERS HAVE THE QUALITY AND THE CHARACTER, AND OF COURSE THE DESIRE. WE ARE THOSE KINDS OF PEOPLE, THOSE KINDS OF ATHLETES

"'Mentality monsters', he used to say. Everybody on the staff is important. Pep [Lijnders, the assistant-manager] is someone who always asks us to be ready as well. We have great leaders on the team as well who can contribute a lot in this aspect.

"And then we have the quality and the character from our players, and of course the desire. You need to always have that fresh feeling within yourself. We are those kinds of people, those kinds of athletes."

Backing the team all the way as they seek to achieve their goals is Liverpool's phenomenal support. Virgil van Dijk says all Reds fans should enjoy these times and Kopites are certainly taking the centre-back's advice, ramping up the atmosphere at last month's fixtures against North West rivals Manchester City, Manchester United and Everton as well as Villarreal.

Alisson: "The atmosphere our supporters created in the FA Cup semi-final, for instance, was amazing. Playing at Wembley against Manchester City, a great opponent – it was everything that we could ask for a semi-final and from our side a victory too.

"Then playing at Anfield is always amazing. Whenever I bring a friend or a family member, they are always saying, 'Wow this is something different from anything that I saw in football'.

"Before Liverpool I played for two teams that have amazing supporters, Internacional and Roma, and I play also for the national team and we are really passionate about football in Brazil.

"But Anfield is very special. The atmosphere you can experience, especially on the Champions League nights because of the things that happened here in the past.

"The atmosphere from the stands can be the reflection of what the team is doing on the pitch too. We can help them with





that and, in turn, they help us by pushing us forward with every challenge."

Talking of those Champions League nights, the power of Anfield was at work again as the Reds established a 2-0 first-leg advantage against Villarreal in what was Alisson's third semi-final at the stadium, following his first appearance at the ground as a Roma player in 2017/18.

He will be hoping to get his hands on the most prestigious trophy in European club football again when the Reds meet Real Madrid at the Stade de France.

"I have lived so many experiences in the Champions League; great ones with Roma and with Liverpool, twice against Barcelona, coming back from different difficult results.

"It is a great achievement to reach a Champions League final because it's one of the most difficult competitions to play. You play against the biggest teams in the world, but we want more now. We want the title and we will fight for that.

"We know how strong our opponent is, so we will respect them while doing our best to win the game. That's all we need to do but it is something we are all looking forward to."

Now Alisson, who is challenging his international team-mate Ederson for the Premier League's Golden Glove award, is hoping to make more dreams come true for the fans.

"In the beginning of the season you start to dream already. You start to set the targets, you start to prepare yourself for the whole season.

"Then when you're playing, you'll see where the team can go. We know that football is not that easy, that you just set targets and then okay, you try to win. You face great opponents and here in England, it's really hard. The Premier League, League Cup, FA Cup and Champions League – you are regularly playing against the best teams in the world.

"But of course when you reach a final then you see how close you are to lifting a trophy. When you taste something, you want to taste it again and the taste of victory is amazing. We have to close this season with that because we work really hard every day, not only ourselves, not only the players but all the staff, all the people around the club.

"We'll face all the games we have in front of us with a desire to win and to achieve our targets."

ANFIELD IS VERY SPECIAL. THE ATMOSPHERE YOU CAN EXPERIENCE, ESPECIALLY ON THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE NIGHTS

GOLDEN GLOVES

Most Premier League clean-sheets 2021/22

Clean-sheets	Player	Club
20	Alisson Becker	
19	Ederson	(Man City)
13	Hugo Lloris	(Tottenham)
13	Edouard Mendy	(Chelsea)
12	Aaron Ramsdale	(Arsenal)
11	Jose Sa	(Wolves)
11	Emiliano Martinez	(Aston Villa)
10	Vicente Guaita	(Crystal Palace)
10	Robert Sanchez	(Brighton)

Correct to 02.05.22

Most clean-sheets for LFC in a Premier League season

Clean-sheets	Player	Season
21	Alisson Becker	2018/19
20	Pepe Reina	2005/06
20	Pepe Reina	2008/09
20	Alisson Becker	2021/22
19	Pepe Reina	2006/07
18	Pepe Reina	2007/08
17	David James	1994/95
17	Jerzy Dudek	2001/02
17	Pepe Reina	2009/10
16	David James	1995/96

Correct to 30.04.22



WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE PARIS

The French capital is part of Liverpool-in-Europe folklore, and it's where we'll meet old foes Real Madrid again in this year's Champions League final



Built to stage games at the 1998 FIFA World Cup, the Stade de France in Paris was also the venue for the 2000 and 2006 UEFA Champions League finals, won by Real Madrid (v Valencia) and Barcelona (v Arsenal) respectively. It's located in the north of Paris, whereas the Parc de Princes, where Liverpool beat Real Madrid in the 1981 European Cup final (below), is to the west.

In beating Villarreal in the recent semi-finals, Liverpool secured a sixth UEFA Champions League win on the road this campaign – the first side to record that many away victories in a season in the competition. In doing so the Reds reached a tenth final – only Real Madrid (16), Bayern Munich and AC Milan (both 11) have featured in the showpiece match of this tournament more often.

After Real's dramatic win over Manchester City in their semi-final, UEFA reporter Simon Hart tweeted from the Bernabeu: "There's a huge cheer as the referee blows for full time. And now the cry of 'Si se puede' – 'Yes, we can'. After what we've just seen, it's no wonder they believe." He later posted: "Madrid looked dead and buried and yet…this is the Bernabeu. As [newspaper] *El Pais* put it after the Chelsea tie: 'Football goes one way and Madrid another'."

Since the last 16 phase was introduced in the 2003/04 season, Real Madrid are the first team to lose a match in the last sixteen (0-1 v Paris Saint-Germain), quarter-final (3-2 v Chelsea) and semi-final (4-3 v Manchester City) in a season and still reach the UEFA Champions League final. Before the semi against City, they'd never come from behind to win a European Cup semi-final after losing the first leg, home or away – they were eliminated on all eight previous occasions

The most recent meeting between Liverpool and Real Madrid was last season's Champions League quarter-final in April 2021. The first leg in the Spanish capital finished 3-1 to Real Madrid with Vinicius Junior and Marco Asensio striking before half-time, Mo Salah pulling one back, then Vinicius restoring the two-goal cushion. "We didn't deserve anything," conceded Reds left-back Andy Robertson.





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WALK ON





In the second leg at Anfield, again behind-closed-doors, Real produced a defensive masterclass in a goalless draw. Their keeper Thibaut Courtois denied Salah, James Milner, Roberto Firmino and Diogo Jota. "We didn't lose the tie tonight, we lost the game obviously in Madrid with the performance we put out there," said Jürgen Klopp after the final whistle.

The final of 2018 was just one of those nights: the first-half injury to Mo Salah, the heartache for goalkeeper Loris Karius, the brilliance of Gareth Bale, the long way home… But what a party the travelling Kopites had, despite the eventual outcome.

After the match Jürgen Klopp had this to say in his press conference: "First of all, congratulations to Real Madrid. Nobody spoke about them and not to forget they won the Champions League tonight. The difference is that you need a little bit of luck in a football game, especially a final, and we not only had no luck, we had none plus bad luck. That's the problem.

"I'm not fine. In fact, I'm the opposite of fine, but I try to be professional. I said it a few times, I have lost games in my life before, I won games in my life before – I know how to deal with that. What you cannot avoid is the feeling you have the night after the game. We all feel really, really bad, and the way home will not be the best trip we ever had in our life but we have to accept it now.

"We wanted everything and got nothing, or minus something with the injury of Mo. At the end, it's a football game. We tried everything to win it – that's why I wouldn't change anything in my preparations. I did the best I could and it was not good enough and I have to accept that. That's it."

Klopp's immediate reaction on facing Real Madrid again in this season's final was: "When we lost that [2018] final, actually my favourite solution would've been let's play the final again next year and against Real Madrid, to be honest – that was in that moment. But we faced Tottenham, which was absolutely fine, in Madrid.

"It seems to be our destiny. It was strange and unlucky for [Manchester] City, but what Madrid did is outstanding. They got through against PSG, Chelsea and City. We said it before we played Villarreal, if you knock out Bayern you deserve to be in the semi-final – and if you knock out these three guys, then you definitely deserve to be in the final. They are now the massive favourites with all the experience they have and all these kind of things.

"It will be great. We were not happy that night, that's clear, but it is a while ago. I'm happy to go there and give it a try, but until then, there are a lot of games to play and you will ask so many questions about Real Madrid between now and then, so I think we can stop here.

"If you go to a final, I think it's good to have the idea that you want to win it and that's what we will work on in the week between the 22nd and the 28th, not before."

As well as a collective 19 European Cup/Champions League wins, there is great respect between the two clubs. When Real won 3-0 at Anfield in the Champions League group game of October 2014, star man Cristiano Ronaldo was applauded off the pitch by Reds fans following his substitution. And when Kopites travelled to Madrid for the return game a month later, they were greeted in the stadium by a banner which read: 'WELCOME LIVERPOOL SUPPORTERS: BIG CLUBS HAVE BIG FANS'.

That 2014 group game at Anfield also made an impression on Real's former striker and club ambassador Emilio Butragueno, who was there as a spectator. He recalls: "We came here, played very well, and something drew my attention: the reception we witnessed from the Liverpool fans. When you lose at home you are upset, but in spite of that they were very pleasant to us. When you play away it's rare to experience that behaviour."

In the Champions League round of 16 in 2008/09 the Reds, managed by Madrid-born Rafael Benitez, made their first competitive visit to the Bernabeu and won 1-0 with Yossi Benayoun scoring from a header. Watching from the stands was Spanish tennis ace and football fan Rafa Nadal. In the return game here Liverpool won 4-0 in one of Anfield's great Euro nights. Fernando Torres, Steven Gerrard (two including a pen) and sub Andrea Dossena got the goals. It was Gerrard's 100th European appearance for LFC, and Real's only loss in their last five visits to England.

In 1981 Liverpool famously beat Real 1-0 to claim their third European Cup, with defender Alan Kennedy scoring the winner at the Parc de Princes in Paris. The Reds remain the last team to defeat Real in a European Cup final.

Emilio Butragueno, who would later become a Real legend, was a young fan at the time and recalls: "I didn't go to Paris but I remember the game well. It was very even, not a beautiful game because it was too tense. We lost with ten minutes to play – the throw-in and Alan Kennedy scoring. It was all the more disappointing for us because it was our first European final since 1966 and we'd been looking forward to it so much.

"I remember Kenny Dalglish, McDermott, Souness; it was a very good, powerful Liverpool team, like a dynasty because they played several finals in very few years. We had a good side too, but it was maybe for us a time of change."

Rafa Benitez spent seven years as a player for Real Madrid Castilla (similar to a 'B' team). After retiring through injury he returned to Real aged 26 to coach the club's youth teams – the springboard to spells with Real Valladolid, Osasuna, Extremadura, Tenerife, Valencia, then of course Liverpool FC with whom he won he won the Champions League (2005) and FA Cup (2006). He managed Real briefly from June 2015 to January 2016. One ex-Liverpool player has managed Real too: Welshman John Toshack had two spells, winning La Liga in 1990.

Carlo Ancelotti has managed five different clubs against Liverpool in 16 matches, winning eight, losing five and drawing three. His AC Milan side lost and won a Champions League final versus LFC, in 2005 and 2007, before he enjoyed four Premier League encounters with the Reds as Chelsea boss from 2009 to 2011. After a Champions League group double-header in October and November 2014 as Real Madrid boss, he was in charge of Napoli when they faced Liverpool four times at the same stage in 2018 and 2019. Then came four Merseyside derby fixtures, with his Everton side winning the most recent, at Anfield behind-closed-doors in February 2021.

Carlo is one of seven people to have lifted the European Cup as both a player and coach, and the second manager, after Bob Paisley, to win the trophy three times. The 2022 final will be his 179th UEFA Champions League match as a manager. "For me," he says, "a final with Liverpool is like a derby because I carry on being an Evertonian."



Several players have worn both the red and white shirts. As well as midfielder Xabi Alonso and goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek, there was Alvaro Arbeloa, Antonio Nunez, Nuri Sahin, Michael Owen, Fernando Morientes and Nicolas Anelka.

Not forgetting winger Steve McManaman who spent nine seasons here before helping Real secure European Cups 8 and 9; his volley in the 2000 final ranks as one of the best. Macca has since revealed in his autobiography that in 2003 former Reds team-mate Robbie Fowler boarded the Real team bus for their 29th league title parade! "It was quite funny having Robbie alongside all the players celebrating the Spanish league, but it wasn't a problem. They all made a fuss of him."







Real's 1966 European Cup winners were young and all-Spanish and known as the *Ye-Ye* team. It came from the Beatles song *She Loves You* and was coined after they posed wearing Fab Four wigs for the newspaper *Marca*.

The first LFC Foundation Official Legends Charity Match held at Anfield was between Liverpool and Real Madrid in March 2017. A crowd of 53,000 watched the hosts prevail 4-3, and for the visitors it was an unforgettable experience. Real midfielder Clarence Seedorf said: "Participating is an honour. I'm not the first and I won't be the last to say that Anfield is absolutely fantastic."

Just recently Alisson Becker was asked who's the best goalkeeper in the world. He replied: "I think I'm doing really well, but I will not say myself. I think Courtois is having a really good season. He's doing a really good season for Real Madrid both in the Champions League and in La Liga that they won. If I would choose one goalkeeper for this season, I would choose him."

"I JUST WENT FOR IT"

Alan Kennedy, goalscoring hero of Liverpool's 1981 European Cup triumph, relives that famous night 40 years on with UEFA



The weather played nice for the fans in Madrid 2019 and Kiev 2018, but in Paris in 1981 it was quite another story. It came down in stair rods on the day of the European Cup final, but no downpour was ever going to dampen Liverpudlian spirits all those years ago – not least when Alan Kennedy's shot rippled the raindrops off the back of the Real Madrid net.

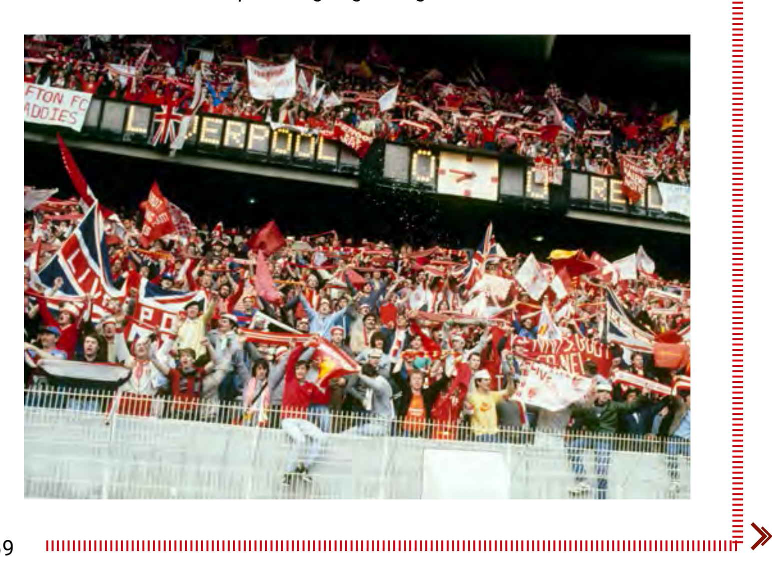
It's hard to convey just how unlikely a scorer, let alone matchwinner, the likeable Geordie left-back was. His nickname was Barney Rubble, after the *Flintstones* character, for his barraging runs down the flank. What he may have lacked in ability – compared to some of his team-mates anyway – he more than made up for in energy and desire. And with nine minutes remaining at a soggy Parc de Princes in the French capital, it was Kennedy who broke the deadlock with a piece of explosive improvisation, racing onto a throw-in from his namesake Ray on the left-flank and crashing a shot past Real keeper Agustin.

He would later tell this magazine: "Even before my time, the finals of 1977 and 78 were just fantastic. I admired Liverpool in those two years when they won the European Cup and thought: I'd love to join that club. Then 12 months later I was playing for them, and a couple of years after that I was scoring the winner in a European Cup final in Paris."

More recently, in an interview with UEFA.com, he recalled: "I never knew I'd be the first full-back to score a winning goal in a European Cup final. But my job – as Bob Paisley, the great manager that he was, described it – was: 'You are there to support, you're there to start moves, you're there to be at the end of moves, and let other players – let the forwards – score the goals and take all the credit'.

"But I certainly changed that in 1981 against Real Madrid. The game itself wasn't a great game. It was on a poor pitch. We had one or two injury problems. I had a broken wrist I was playing with and, in the end, we absolutely knew – and Bob Paisley will have known this from the start – that one goal was going to separate the two teams.

"They did have a couple of chances. We had several chances and I just thought to myself: it's time we showed what Liverpool is all about. I made the run forward not expecting the ball to be coming to me, and I chested the ball down and went forward. One of their players came down and tried to…I think he just tried to take me out of the game but he missed me and I found myself in a position I'd been in before. I'm not saying I was going to hit the target, but my mind was made up: I was going for a goal.



"The goalkeeper, slightly misjudging where his position was, left the near-post open and the ball flew in the back of the net.

"It was certainly a great moment. I didn't think, first of all, that it would be me scoring that goal. We had [Kenny] Dalglish, we also had David Johnson and the likes of Terry McDermott and Ray Kennedy, who were more qualified to score goals than I was. But I think, in some ways, when I got in those positions, I just went for it. I didn't think about passing the ball.

"Nowadays it's become more normal for full-backs to get forward more, especially at a club like Liverpool. But back then I think that's what Bob Paisley wanted too, and he certainly got it from the player on the other side of the pitch. Phil Neal, whose record in cup finals is the equal to mine in terms of scoring goals, and he was allowed to get forward down the right-hand side.



"So that meant I had to come back and cover a little bit and hold my position, but when I went forward he had to hold his position, and I think we worked quite well from that side of it. We were probably one of the first sets of full-backs to do something like that, to get forward and to either score goals or make goals, and that was our game. It wasn't just about the forwards, it wasn't just about the midfield to provide and score – it was about everybody contributing to the game.

"We knew the likes of Alan Hansen and Phil Thompson were our defence. So we were allowed the license to get forward when we could and support the midfield and on lots of occasions, if the forwards couldn't score, they allowed the full-backs to get all the glory at that particular time.

"But, you know, it didn't matter who scored the goal. We all said that against Real Madrid, it doesn't matter who scores the goal as long as we win the game.

"Of the two teams I'm not quite sure who were the favourites. Real Madrid had the experience in the competition and they had great managers and great players and whatever, but Liverpool were coming to the fore and British teams were doing so well in European football. In 1977, Liverpool won it. In 78 they won it. In 79 it was Nottingham Forest. In 80 it was Forest again. And Liverpool were there in 81. So the dominant side of it was the English or British football because we had one or two teams from Scotland who were doing pretty well too.

"Liverpool's experience showed on that day. Real Madrid were possibly the favourites. I won't say that they were a great, great team, but you still had to respect them – they were still Real Madrid. On the night it just wasn't great football on a poor pitch and in the end it was decided by one goal. I think we knew that and that's where managers came to the fore. Bob Paisley, he set his stall out: 'This is going to be a one-nil – whoever scores the first goal is going to win the game'. And that's what he felt.

"So the longer the game went on, he was okay about it. He knew Liverpool would grow and grow and eventually break down the Real Madrid defence. Whether it was me, whether it was Phil Neal, whether it was any other player, it didn't matter who did it. But we broke down the defence, we got past them and we scored the goal, and eventually we won the cup."

ORIGI TIME



Of Divock's 22 goals to date in the Premier League for Liverpool, he's scored half as a substitute, and a fair few have been crucial and rather dramatic




L.F.C.
standard
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Words: William Hughes

When Divock Origi added to his goalscoring catalogue against Everton in Premier League games last month, the Belgian striker also set a new club record. It was the no27's eleventh Premier League goal after coming off the bench, seeing him overtake the previous high for a Liverpool substitute in the competition, the ten goals scored by Daniel Sturridge.

While Divock's Kop-end header against the Blues was his sixth derby goal in total, it was also his third after coming off the bench in the fixture.

His first sealed a 3-1 win at Anfield on the opening day of April 2017 and came with almost his first touch after replacing the injured Sadio Mane.

Presented by an incisive through-ball by Philippe Coutinho, he thrashed a shot past Everton keeper Joel Robles from the edge of the area in front of the Kop. It helped Jürgen Klopp create history as the first Liverpool manager to win his first three Merseyside league derbies.

Fast-forward to the 2018/19 season and there was another Kop-end goal as a sub which will be forever etched into the tapestry of derby history. It was December, it was a Sunday, and Origi had replaced Roberto Firmino with six minutes remaining and the game in a goalless deadlock.

Another six minutes into additional time, Virgil van Dijk mis-hit a shot which ballooned skywards towards the Everton goal. Keeper Jordan Pickford misjudged the flight and, after he finger-tipped the ball from above the bar, it bounced onto the woodwork before falling to Origi who gleefully headed home the winner.

His most recent intervention against the Blues this season saw him head beyond Pickford, again in front of the Kop, after Jordan



He is a legend on and off the pitch. He is a fantastic footballer for me, and I know it sounds ridiculous as I don't line him up often, [but] he is a world-class striker, he is our best finisher, definitely. Everybody loves Div and rightly so. He was again very decisive. I'm very, very happy for him

Henderson's deep cross had been spectacularly volleyed back across goal by Luis Diaz. The 85th-minute goal came after he had replaced Naby Keita.

"He is a legend on and off the pitch," Klopp told the media afterwards. "He is a fantastic footballer for me, and I know it sounds ridiculous as I don't line him up often, [but] he is a world-class striker, he is our best finisher, definitely.

"Everybody loves Div and rightly so. He was again very decisive. I'm very, very happy for him."

It was the striker's second pivotal goalscoring contribution from the bench this season. Back in December he gave the Reds a priceless three points with a late winner at Wolves. On that occasion he'd come on in place of skipper Jordan Henderson as the Reds went in search of a goal and he duly provided it four minutes into added-time.

With seconds remaining, Origi latched on to a Mo Salah pass, turned and smashed the ball beyond Jose Sa in the Wolves goal. His goal sparked huge celebrations on the Liverpool bench at Molineux with Klopp running straight to the centre-circle to hug the striker after the full-time whistle. "I hope some day people will write books about him," said the elated boss.

Asked what Klopp had said to him before he entered the pitch that day, the forward replied simply: "'Be Divock'. Play your game, try and contribute and in the end, help the team. We needed a goal, we knew that. Defensively also, we were trying to keep a clean-sheet.

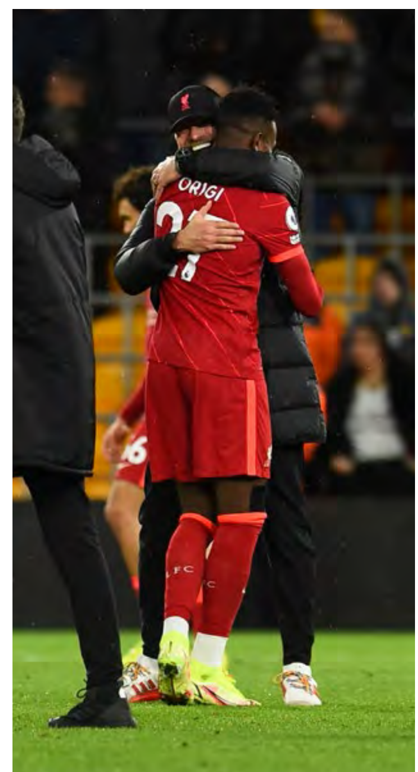


"We were playing against a good team that are strong in defence and in attack and in the end I was just playing my game and trying to help the team get the win."

His goal against Everton a couple of weeks ago was Origi's third off the bench this season with the first coming in a 3-2 reverse at West Ham United in November. It's the only time a Divock goal from the bench has come in a losing cause.

Seven minutes after replacing Diogo Jota with the Reds trailing 3-1 at the London Stadium, he latched onto a pass from Trent Alexander-Arnold before sweeping home a shot on the turn to give





the Reds late hope. But the Hammers held on to inflict Livepool's first defeat of the season.

The first of Origi's eleven Premier League goals as a sub came back in December 2015 and rescued a 2-2 home draw with West Bromwich Albion. It came in the fifth of eight added minutes and arrived after he had been found by Jordan Henderson before his shot wrong-footed Baggies goalkeeper Boaz Myhill.

After the game Origi, who had replaced centre-back Dejan Lovren with 12 minutes of the regulation 90 minutes left, joined his team-mates in saluting the Kop in a German-style show of thanks. "It was only one point but it felt like three," explained Klopp.

On Valentine's Day 2016 he'd been on the Villa Park pitch only a matter of seconds before he added Liverpool's fourth goal in a 6-0 victory at Aston Villa. Released by a fine Coutinho through-ball, Origi calmly slotted his shot beyond Villa keeper Mark Bunn.

There was still time for a couple more goals off the bench in his debut season of 2015/16 at Anfield and both came in a 4-1 win over Stoke City in April.



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On as a half-time replacement for winger Sheyi Ojo, he wasted no time in putting his name on the scoresheet. Four minutes after the restart, he produced a fine header to beat Potters keeper Jakob Haugaard after a James Milner cross from the right. He then made it 4-1 after 65 minutes with a powerful effort which some had thought was intended as a cross for Sturridge. Klopp, however, was in no doubt about his no27's intentions.

"He really wanted to shoot, it was not a cross," he said afterwards. "Even on the bench, I was not surprised."

In November 2016, the Reds were enduring a frustrating afternoon at home to Sunderland. With 15 minutes left Liverpool had been unable to find a way through the visitors' deep defence and it looked as though they might be about to lose ground on league leaders Chelsea and fellow pacesetters Manchester City.

Origi had replaced the injured Coutinho just after the half-hour mark and it was he who found a way through with Pickford the beaten goalkeeper, something the England international would have to get used to.



> You have to stay positive because you never know when the team will need you

Receiving a pass from Henderson on the left of the area, he cut back inside a challenge from Sunderland midfielder Duncan Watmore and curled a shot low into the far corner of the goal.

It settled the Reds down and James Milner added a second from the penalty spot in added-time to complete a 2-0 win over David Moyes' side.

After the game, Origi, whose opportunities had been limited, admitted: "To be honest, it has been very difficult. As a young player – as a footballer – your life is football. When you're on the pitch you enjoy yourself and when you are not on the pitch you have to accept it and you have to know it is a professional world and we have a very good team.

"You have to stay positive and believe in yourself. You never know when the team will need you."

Moving ahead to May 2019 and the Reds went to Newcastle United for an important Saturday-evening fixture between the two Champions League semi-finals with Barcelona.

Having lost the first leg 3-0 at the Nou Camp, the Reds needed to win at St James' Park to stay on the coat-tails of Manchester City as the Premier League title race entered the home straight.

Liverpool's 37th league game of the campaign was level at 2-2 when Mo Salah went down with a nasty-looking injury with 20 minutes to play. The Egyptian was stretchered off and Origi came on to replace him. Four minutes were remaining when he came up with the goods once again.

Midfielder Xherdan Shaqiri whipped a free-kick into the box and fellow sub Origi sent a glancing header past Magpies keeper Martin Dubravka and into the back of the net to spark scenes of joy among the travelling Kop. Saturday night and we like the way you move, Divock Origi!

"It was very important for us to get that late goal at Newcastle and, again, we did it in the end with a big heart," he recalled. "It was a big fight for us and we were all very happy because you could see it took a lot from us. We got there and it was a very important step for us because we wanted to stay in the fight and take it to the last day."

The remaining weeks of that 2018/19 season would see Divock write his name into Liverpool legend. A few days after his winner in the North East, he scored twice as the Reds overturned their first-leg deficit to beat Barca 4-0 on arguably Anfield's greatest night.

Then, of course, came his most famous goal as a Liverpool sub as he sealed the club's sixth European Cup/Champions League success with the second goal against Tottenham Hotspur in Madrid.

Sturridge (10), Ryan Babel and Christian Benteke (six each) and Roberto Firmino (five) have all scored important goals off the bench in Premier League action for the Reds, but no-one has netted more than Origi.

"It is such a pleasure to be able to play football at the highest level, to win these games," he says.

"For the club it means so much. For me it means so much."







It is such a pleasure to be able to play football at the highest level. For the club it means so much. For me it means so much

“WE SHOULD ENJOY THESE MOMENTS”

Virgil van Dijk on playing with this team, for this manager, in front of these fans – and why it really doesn’t get much better







I WOULDN'T SAY WE HAVE ANY EGOS OR PLAYERS WHO ARE A BIT OF A PROBLEM FOR THE CLUB OR FOR THE BOSS. WE DON'T SPEAK ABOUT IT, BUT WE ARE ALL ON THE SAME WAVELENGTH AND WE ALL WANT TO HAVE SUCCESS

VIRGIL, DOES A SEASON LIKE THIS MAKE IT OBVIOUS WHY YOU WANTED TO PLAY FOR LIVERPOOL?

It's very obvious why I wanted to come here. Liverpool is arguably the biggest club in the world and we play for trophies.

From the first six months when I came here we played for trophies and got to the Champions League final in Kiev. Unfortunately we didn't win it, but as the years have gone on we've managed to get a couple of trophies – some quite big ones.

It was a dream come true for me to play for Liverpool and I wanted to play under Jürgen Klopp. It was a fantastic achievement for me and my family to play here.

HOW HAVE YOU DEVELOPED AS A PLAYER SINCE STARTING OUT IN THE NETHERLANDS?

I started in Holland at Willem II and Groningen and they made me the player I am today, but then I went to Celtic and it is such a big club.

We played in the Champions League, but when Southmapton came in it was always going to be a dream-come-true to play in the Premier League and then I came to Liverpool.

So I think over the years I've developed my qualities and experience helps a lot, especially for a centre-half.

DO YOU SEE YOURSELF AS A KEY PART OF THE PROGRESS LIVERPOOL HAS MADE OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS OR SO?

When I joined the club there was already a rebuild and I am definitely not the guy who solved everything. When the boss came in then, first and foremost he got time to really implement his ideas for the club and to bring in the players he wanted.

Sadio Mane and Georginio Wijnaldum were very important for the club and obviously then I came and Alisson, Fabinho, Mo… The players that have come in and the personalities that have come in have clicked, in my opinion. That's also part of the success that we have.

I wouldn't say we have any egos or players who are a bit of a problem for the club or for the boss. We don't speak about it, but we are all on the same wavelength and we all want to have success. That's why we tolerate a lot from each other because we want to get the best out of each other.

WAS THERE A PARTICULAR DEFENDER WHO WAS YOUR IDOL WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP?

No, Ronaldinho was always my idol. He's not a defender, of course, but he was my hero and what a player he was. The

joy he played with, the quality he had, the goals he scored. He was a well-deserved Golden Ball winner and definitely my idol, but I was always a defender.

I played for a long period at right-back and then centre-back. There was a time also in Groningen, after I made my debut, when I played as a striker because I was quite tall, I could jump and I'm quite quick for such a tall guy.

That was only occasional and it still happens now and then, but only when we are losing. So it really doesn't happen too many times. Wherever the manager needs me I will play, but with the quality we have I don't think he'll need me to play as a striker too often because the strikers we have are world-class.



YOUR LONG, DIAGONAL PASSES ARE PART OF LIVERPOOL'S GAME WHEN IN POSSESSION – HOW DID YOU PERFECT YOUR TECHNIQUE?

Just training. I train a lot and work on passes with a team-mate after training, practising passes left and right. In training I take time to improve everything.

The manager is very important for all of us, but you also learn from the games you play. You learn from situations that happen in a game, situations that go well and situations that don't go well.

You try to improve where necessary and there is always room for improvement. I would say the manager is very important together with the staff, and Pepijn Lijnders is very important for the team and for me.

YOU ARE LIVERPOOL'S CAPTAIN WHEN JORDAN HENDERSON AND JAMES MILNER AREN'T SELECTED – DO YOU SEE YOURSELF AS A LEADER?

I'm a leader in general, in my opinion, and I want to be one of the guys who leads by example on and off the pitch. I have to have responsibility in my position as a centre-half because you have an overview of the pitch so you have to speak and communicate well.

Honestly, I got chosen by the players in the team as the third captain and I am very proud to be able to lead the team out, and lead the club wherever we go. It is just a proud moment when I am captain.

WHAT KIND OF THINGS DO YOU SAY TO YOUNG PLAYERS OR NEW PLAYERS AS A LEADER IN THE DRESSING-ROOM?

I don't say anything fancy, I just say what I think is right to say. If you see someone is nervous you try to calm them down; if you see someone is overconfident you tell them to relax and focus on the game.

These are all things that happen and in the game I'm trying to organise the last line of the team. That's what I always try to do and everything that I say is all feeling, it's not forced.

We have a very good group, in my opinion. For instance, we have Spanish-speaking players and this has helped Luis Diaz a lot because he doesn't speak English so far. It helped him to settle in with everything that he needed.









With Ibrahima Konate, for example, he is an easy-going guy and everybody is helping each other. We have a great group of players and boys that do everything for each other. That's been the case with those two and that's been the case with me as well.

THERE'S AN FA CUP FINAL TO LOOK FORWARD TO AGAINST CHELSEA, BUT HOW DO YOU ASSESS THE 3-2 SEMI-FINAL WIN AGAINST MANCHESTER CITY?
In the first half we were outstanding, with and without the ball. Obviously the goal they scored early in the second half didn't help the mood or the momentum we had created, so we had to dig deep.

We had to get through the next ten minutes after that goal and we had a good chance that would have finished the game, in my opinion. In the end, we had to dig deep again because they scored the second goal and then anything can happen.

We won, but we didn't celebrate much afterwards because there was nothing really to celebrate at that moment. We want to win the final against Chelsea and if we do that we can celebrate after the final.

DID YOU EXPECT TO GO THREE UP AGAINST MAN CITY IN THE FIRST HALF GIVEN NO TEAM HAS DONE THAT SINCE LIVERPOOL IN THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE IN 2018?
If I'm honest, no, because they are a fantastic team and they have shown it over the last few years, so it's credit to us that we did. Sadio was outstanding, very important for us, but overall the team performance was great.

It felt more like we played at home with our fans at Wembley – we had so many fans compared to theirs, but we still knew it was going to be tough.

Our fans are always important. They've always been there and there's nothing new in that, but hopefully everyone can keep their nerve a little bit now because obviously it gets nervy at times.

We can't promise something unless we give it everything and we'll see at the end of the season what we have achieved, but the position we are in now is incredible.

CAN WE MENTION TRYING TO WIN THE QUADRUPLE?
You can mention whatever you want, but I won't be mentioning it because it is something we don't talk about. We hear these things from the media, trying to put even more pressure on us than we already have, but we don't care.

It has never happened in England so there is a reason for this because it is so difficult, but while we are still in all competitions we will try our best and give everything that we have.

It felt more like we played at home with our fans at Wembley – we had so many fans compared to our opponents, but we still knew it was going to be tough


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If it happens, we're going to have a very big party! But we just focus on the games ahead of us to be ready for the next intense game we have to play.

WITH SO MUCH STILL TO PLAY FOR, IT MUST BE GOOD TO BE VIRGIL VAN DIJK RIGHT NOW?

It's always good to be Virgil van Dijk [laughs]! But no, as a player you want to be in this position to be able to compete for these trophies at this stage of the season. To still be in three competitions with a month left of the season is something everybody wants as a player.

We are looking forward to everything that is happening and hopefully we will be on the success side of this story, but nothing is sure and that's the beauty of football.

For me personally, after coming back from the injury that I had last year, it is just amazing to be in all of the competitions still at this time of the season. We've got one of them ticked off and hopefully it can be a special year, but we'll take it a game at a time.

Yes, of course we feel some momentum, but that can change pretty quickly. We'll see at the end of the season if it's enough.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THIS LIVERPOOL TEAM?

Special. In general it is a special place to be. One, the whole combination of us players and staff as one on the pitch performing. But two, the people behind the scenes and the fans are always there for us wherever we go.

Wherever we go they are there so it is a special time to be a Liverpool fan or a Liverpool player and we shouldn't take it for granted. We should enjoy these moments as well because it is not something that happens often, or for a long time. Long may it continue, but we should enjoy it as well.

A LOT HAS BEEN SAID AND WRITTEN ABOUT LIVERPOOL'S HIGH DEFENSIVE LINE, POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE – WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON IT?

Everybody can say what they want. We always try to put pressure high up the pitch and obviously this has caught people's eyes more than it did in previous times.

Whenever we concede a goal it looks like it's because of the high-line, but it is what it is. We try to do it for a reason and this season I think after the Manchester United game we had 20 clean-sheets so it mustn't be working too badly.

Obviously there will always be something to talk about and if that's the high-line then so be it. We know when things are going well, we also know when things are not going well and need to improve. That's the only way forward.

We want to improve – each and every one of us. That's key and so far, so good. I'm really enjoying working with the boss and I'm so glad he wanted to work with me as well and make me a very important player for this football club

WHICH DO YOU DREAM OF LIFTING MORE: THE PREMIER LEAGUE TROPHY OR THE EUROPEAN CUP?
The World Cup [laughs]! No, you dream about lifting everything when you are competing in all the competitions like we are, but dreams are sometimes just dreams.

You can keep dreaming, but like I said we will give everything we have. With the quality we've got, we've got a good shot at the trophies, but we're facing amazing teams and we have to fight for every centimetre on the pitch, so that's what we're going to do.

It's difficult sometimes to enjoy it and not be nervous, but we're going to give it a go and see what it brings.

FINALLY, AS PART OF A ROUND OF INTERVIEWS VIRGIL DID WITH INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTERS, A DANISH JOURNALIST ASKED: "LOOKING FROM THE OUTSIDE, JÜRGEN KLOPP SEEMS SO INTENSE, SO DEMANDING, BUT ALSO HONEST AND EMBRACING – WHAT IS HE LIKE?"
What you said, you're absolutely right. You have good human knowledge. He's a big presence so whenever he walks into the room you know there is someone there.

It's the same on the pitch in training, but also on the sidelines. Him and his team – Pepijn Lijnders, Peter Krawietz – they do a great job of preparing the team but also looking for solutions in games.

We also want to improve. Each and every one of us. That's key and so far, so good. I'm really enjoying working with the boss and I'm so glad he wanted to work with me as well and make me a very important player for this club.



BACK OF THE NET

Reds striker Leanne Kiernan talks us through the golden goals which fired her side to the top flight in style

Forward Leanne Kiernan enjoyed an outstanding debut campaign with the Reds, matching Natasha Dowie's club record for league goals in a season. Dowie hit the net 13 times during Liverpool's first FA Women's Super League title success in 2013 and Republic of Ireland international Kiernan matched that tally as Liverpool marched to the FA Women's Championship crown.

She was also named Player of the Year by the Liverpool Women Supporters' Club. Here, the 23-year-old no9 talks us through each and every one of those strikes, together with her fine solo strike against Aston Villa in the Continental Cup…

1 COVENTRY UNITED (A) 3 OCTOBER 2021 WON 2-0

A fine diving header from substitute Rachel Furness' centre…

"Furney puts it on a plate for me every time. I would say this was probably one of my favourite moments of the season. Getting your first goal for the club you've just come to is always important.

"As a number nine it's kind of your responsibility to score goals so that was just a really nice feeling."



2 COVENTRY UNITED (A) 3 OCTOBER 2021 WON 2-0

Rounds keeper Olivia Clark to make sure of the points after being played in by centre-back Leighanne Robe…

"It was different playing on the plastic pitch at Coventry when you're used to playing on grass pitches all the time. I remember this was a tough game and it was the second half that we scored both the goals, but it was just nice to get my first ones.

"This second came from a Leighanne pass after she brought the ball out of defence – Robey running riot! She ran through a number of their team and I remember it came to me and I just thought: I need to take it around the keeper to put this in the net. It worked out and it was great to get my first goals for Liverpool."



INTERVIEW: William Hughes

3 SHEFFIELD UNITED (A) 9 OCTOBER 2021 WON 2-0

Doubles Liverpool's lead at Bramall Lane, heading home at the back-post after Rachel Furness' cross from the right…

"That was a brilliant day too. Again I think it was Furney putting it on a plate for me – there is a bit of a theme developing here!

"That was an amazing feeling. We played in Sheffield United's main stadium that day in front of what was a record crowd for the Championship at the time [4,100]. It's been really nice playing in some big stadiums even though we've been in the Championship. We played at Vicarage Road and Ashton Gate too.

"I just had to get my head on the cross and it made it two-nil after Charlotte [Wardlaw] had put us in front with an unbelievable goal."



4 ASTON VILLA (H) 13 OCTOBER 2021 (CONTINENTAL CUP) DREW 1-1

A brilliant individual effort soon after coming off the bench for her fourth goal in three games…

"I remember Beardy [manager Matt Beard] telling me to warm up as I was on the bench that night and they were one-up after scoring an early goal. I came on and only lasted seven minutes before I got injured but it wasn't the worst as I got to celebrate a goal and we went on to win a bonus point from the game on pennos!

"It was pleasing that I could help the girls and it was a nice goal. We performed pretty well whenever we met Super League opposition in the cup competitions. I was feeling quite confident then and a confident striker always helps – it's great when you're going into the games feeling like that. It was my fourth goal in three games? That's not bad!"





5 LEWES (H) 31 OCTOBER 2021 WON 2-0

Strokes the ball home at the far-post after visiting keeper Shanell Salgado could only parry a low ball across goal from winger Mel Lawley…

"That was a great game as my family and my friends were over from Ireland and it was nice to get a couple of goals in front of them, to have them there watching. And yeah, this time it was Mel putting it on a plate!"



6 LEWES (H) 31 OCTOBER 2021 WON 2-0

Hooks home a clever shot after Taylor Hinds' deep cross had only been half-cleared…

"The second one was from the edge of the box. I remember thinking: oh that was quite nice! As a striker you want to be scoring goals and it's good when you work hard in pre-season and you find it works out for you.

"I remember when I signed for Liverpool and people were asking me, 'Are you looking forward to coming and what do you think you bring?' I said, 'Well, I'm hoping I'm bringing goals'. So it's been quite nice that I could provide the fans and the team with goals. That's my job."

7 DURHAM (A) 14 NOVEMBER 2021 WON 2-0

Pounces from close-range after goalkeeper Megan Borthwick fails to deal with a Rhiannon Roiberts cross from the right…

"Everybody was outstanding that day. We knew it was going to be tough going up to Durham from the previous year when they had beaten Liverpool. It was a difficult game obviously, but we did really well that day.

"I remember Razza [Roberts] was on fire. I think I scored with my belly button or something but they all count I guess!"





8 SUNDERLAND (A) 20 NOVEMBER 2021 WON 3-1

A clinical finish after being picked out by Furness' pass from the right, chesting the ball down before firing home…

"It's an Irish link-up we've got going on! I remember that game and I loved that kit. Every time I played in that kit I was like: it's going to be a good day!

"I enjoyed that goal and it was a big one because we went one-nil down and had to come back. That was a big game away from home and we knew that we had to get the points on the board. It put us 2-1 up. I was just on a roll then!"

9 BLACKBURN ROVERS (A) 9 JANUARY 2022 WON 6-0

A superb effort after dispossessing defender Kayleigh McDonald on the left, cutting inside and bending a right-footer into the far corner…

"My friend came to watch me play and it was the first time she'd seen me with Liverpool. So that was an enjoyable, enjoyable day and I'll remember that one right for the rest of my life.

"It was nice to get my first hat-trick with the club in the first season. I enjoyed that first one and that goal was probably my highlight of the season."

10 BLACKBURN ROVERS (A) 9 JANUARY 2022 WON 6-0

A back-post tap-in after goalie Alex Brooks had pushed away a low cross from Missy Bo Kearns…

"It's nice when you get those easy ones. You know, you can have ten chances and it hits off the post or something, but then you get one simple one like that. As a striker you can't complain when it's just put right in front of you."



11 BLACKBURN ROVERS (A) 9 JANUARY 2022 WON 6-0)

A left-footed finish from a Mel Lawley cross…

"Mel set this one up. All the girls have been brilliant and they've really helped me with my scoring. As you can tell, they've all been whipping them in for me – all I have to do is pop them in the net.

"It's been enjoyable playing with the quality of players we have and I wouldn't have any goals on the board if it wasn't for them.

"I was lucky enough to get the hat-trick in six minutes but as a striker you want to bring home the matchday ball so it was really special to get the third. I'll put it in a special case so that I can remember the day."



12 COVENTRY UNITED (H) 6 FEBRUARY 2022 WON 3-0

Doubles the Reds' lead when she races clear down the left before slotting home at the near-post…

"Yana [Daniels] set both of these two up. She's been brilliant throughout the season and she's a great person as well. I really enjoy playing with her. Yana's crossing ability is excellent and she's scored some really important goals for us as well this season. She got a call up to the Belgium team again too so it was nice to see that her efforts aren't going unnoticed either.

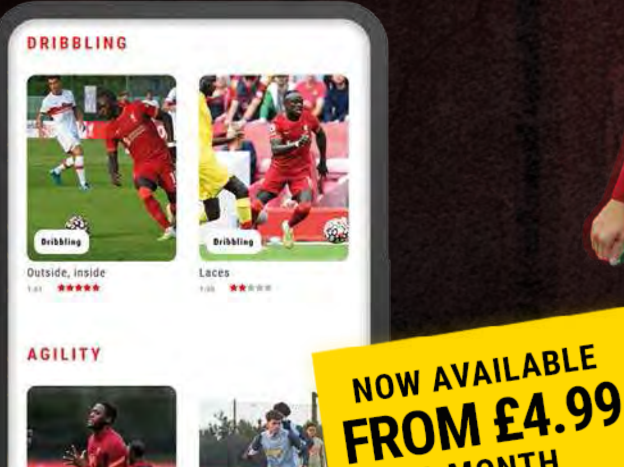
"I quite enjoyed the first one because it had been a few games since I had scored so it was nice to hit the net again and get back to it."





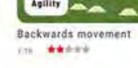
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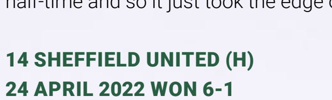
13 COVENTRY UNITED (H)
6 FEBRUARY 2022 WON 3-0

Adds another on the stroke of half-time, heading home a pinpoint cross from Yana Daniels on the left…

"I remember my dad saying, 'You really need to work on your heading, Leanne – you see all these strikers scoring with their heads'. And I did work on that a lot during the season and I got a few from my head.

"That was really enjoyable because as a striker you want to be able to score with your right and your left but your head's important too. This one put us into a 3-0 lead just before half-time and so it just took the edge off the game too."





14 SHEFFIELD UNITED (H)
24 APRIL 2022 WON 6-1

A tap-in after some great work down the right by Yana Daniels and Mel Lawley…

"This was a special day as we got to celebrate winning the title in front of our fans. We wanted to produce a really good performance and we did, which was really satisfying.

"I'd been told in the build-up to the game that I needed one more goal to equal the club record and so it was really pleasing when I managed to get it. Since Katie Stengel came in back in January I've often played more on the left and it's been brilliant having Katie and it obviously brings something different to the team.

"Honestly, all the girls have been brilliant this season and it's been really good that I'm versatile so that I can change in and out of various positions. We have six players who can play in the three attacking roles and everybody's quite versatile, so it's meant we could mix round the formations in what was a special season for us."





LEANNE ON THE WSL

"We know that it's going to be much tougher next season, but we will be prepped and Beardy knows what he's talking about. He's been in that league for years, so we just need to trust the process and what he's going to provide for next season and we'll be ready.

"We knew coming into pre-season that it was going to take a wee while to click as a team as there were a lot of new players – six or seven of us new faces. So we knew that we just had to trust in him. We did and we've got great results out of it.

"So, next season, we'll be ready."

FA WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP - FINAL TABLE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
Liverpool	22	16	4	2	49	11	38	52
London City Lionesses	22	13	2	7	35	22	13	41
Bristol City	22	11	4	7	43	28	15	37
Crystal Palace	22	11	4	7	35	39	-4	37
Charlton Athletic	22	10	4	8	27	18	9	34
Durham	22	10	4	8	30	28	2	34
Sheffield United	22	9	6	7	34	31	3	33
Lewes	22	9	2	11	23	24	-1	29
Sunderland	22	6	6	10	23	-9	-6	24
Blackburn Rovers	22	5	2	15	17	41	-24	17
Coventry United	22	5	7	10	18	32	-14	12*
Watford	22	2	5	15	18	46	-28	11

* 10 pts deducted for entering voluntary liquidation

LFCW: THE PROMOTION SEASON

AUGUST
29 LONDON CITY 0-1

SEPTEMBER
4 WATFORD 3-2
Dean 2, Kearns
12 BRISTOL CITY 0-0
26 CRYSTAL PALACE 2-1
Hodson, Hinds

OCTOBER
3 COVENTRY UNITED 2-0
Kiernan 2
9 SHEFFIELD UNITED 2-0
Wardlaw, Kiernan
31 LEWES 2-0
Kiernan 2

NOVEMBER
7 BLACKBURN ROVERS 0-0
14 DURHAM 2-0
Kiernan, Hinds
20 SUNDERLAND 3-1
Daniels, Kiernan, Lawley

JANUARY
9 BLACKBURN ROVERS 6-0
Kiernan 3, Furness 2, Fahey
16 WATFORD 1-0
Stengel
23 CRYSTAL PALACE 4-0
Daniels 2, Stengel, Furness

FEBRUARY
6 COVENTRY UNITED 3-0
Hinds, Kiernan 2
13 SUNDERLAND 3-0
Daniels, Stengel, Kearns

MARCH
6 LONDON CITY 1-1
Stengel
13 CHARLTON ATHLETIC 1-0
Matthews
20 CHARLTON ATHLETIC 0-0
27 DURHAM 3-0
Furness 2, Stengel

APRIL
3 BRISTOL CITY 4-2
Fahey, Matthews, Stebgel, Kearns
24 SHEFFIELD UNITED 6-1
Stengel 2, Kiernan, Lawley, Kearns, Matthews

MAY
1 LEWES 1-2
Hodson

CONTINENTAL CUP

OCTOBER
13 ASTON VILLA 1-1*
Kiernan

NOVEMBER
7 SHEFFIELD UNITED 0-0*
17 BLACKBURN ROVERS 2-1
Bailey, Hinds

DECEMBER
15 SUNDERLAND 0-0**

JANUARY
19 TOTTENHAM (QF) 0-1

* LFCW won bonus point after penalty shoot-out
** LFCW lost penalty shoot-out

FA CUP

DECEMBER
12 BURNLEY 4-0
Fahey, Furness, Lawley 2

JANUARY
30 LINCOLN CITY 6-0
Robe 3, Stengel, Moore, Wardlaw

FEBRUARY
27 ARSENAL 0-4

WHAT OCCURRED APR

IMAGINE BEING US

Words: Chris McLoughlin



It's amazing what you can get done during an international break when there are no Liverpool matches to watch. Tidy the garden, family day-trips, binge-watch Bridgerton, paint a giant Mo Salah mural on the side of your house…

Okay, so it wasn't his own crib, but the giant Salah mural that street artist John Culshaw unveiled on Anfield Road is quite magnificent. Painting the Egyptian King opposite the King Harry pub means it isn't just Chelsea who've got a Kings Road now either.

Quite what Mo made of it when the Liverpool team bus drove past en route to the Watford game who knows, but it must have given him a huge boost going into the busiest April since a Channel 6 News reporter in New York discovered four ninja turtles in a sewer.

Roy Hodgson surprised nobody with his 4-1-4-1 formation. Watford were well-organised, adopted a low block, came for a nil-nil and tried to nick a goal, which they almost did when Juraj Kucka sprung Liverpool's offside trap and Alisson made a one-v-one save.

It was a well-timed kick up the backside – first half lulls in 12.30pm kick-offs are a thing – and 34 seconds later the Reds were ahead when Diogo Jota headed in yet another outstanding cross from Trent….hang on, from Joe Gomez.



You can't replace the irreplaceable as far as Trent, who was still recovering from a hamstring injury, is concerned, but how many centre-backs can cross a ball like Gomez when he's deputising at full-back?

His ball for Jota's glancing header was so good that Ben Foster flew out of his goal in full Superman pose to punch clear but must have felt like he'd left his cape in the phonebox as it flashed past him and 'Dio-goal' headed in his 20th goal of the season. Ten of those goals have opened the scoring, by the way, which makes such a difference in these kinds of games.

It looked like finishing 1-0 until the 89th minute when Kucka presumably thought Magic Weekend was back at Anfield and turned into James Roby, rugby-tackling Jota to the ground from a corner. VAR gave ref Stuart Attwell a nudge, his telly told him it was a pen, and up stepped Fabinho to slot the ball home to make it ten Premier League wins on the bounce.

"We just want to make this season, hopefully, an unforgettable one – for us as players, for the staff, but as a whole club," said Virgil van Dijk as attention turned towards the Champions League quarter-final first leg against Benfica in Lisbon. "The things that have been going on at the moment at Liverpool, it's something that no-one should take for granted."

Before the travelling Kop set foot on Portuguese soil there was another success to celebrate as Liverpool Women clinched promotion back to the top-flight with a 4-2 win at Bristol City. Almost 6,000 were there to see skipper Niamh Fahey open the scoring and then lift a home-made trophy, *a la* the 1960s Curlett Cup (ask yer grandad).

"Bo Kearns, the Scouser in our team, has me down for the Hendo shuffle," she said when asked how she'd lift the actual Championship trophy later in the month. Which is all well and good, but who is going to do the Joel Matip hand celebrations?



Over in Lisbon, a couple of new songs were emerging among Liverpool's away supporters. "We're gonna rock with Jürgen Klopp tonight, we're gonna rock rock rock to the broad daylight" did the rounds on social media, and then came the song of the season.

"Jürgen said to me, you know we'll win the Premier League, you know he said so. I'm in love with him and I feel fine. I'm so glad that Jürgen is a Red, I'm so glad he delivered what he said. Jürgen said to me, you know, we'll win the Premier League, you know he said so. I'm in love with him and I feel fine."



BOOM! It has been a long time – too long – since Kopites adopted a song by The Beatles, but what started on and off the pitch in the 1960s is truly continuing in the 2020s.

Huge queues outside Estadio da Luz meant not every Red was inside in time for kick-off, but a 3-1 win against Benfica capped off a great trip for travelling Kopites, many sporting new headgear.

The Reds also had a new goalscorer: Ibrahima Konate. The big Frenchman headed home Andy Robertson's corner to open the scoring, leaving Fabinho so shocked that he botched his knee-slide celebration and ended up looking like he was break-dancing on his back.

It was a Konate interception which led to Liverpool's brilliant second goal too with the fit-again Alexander-Arnold pinging a stunning diagonal pass for Luis Diaz to head into Sadio Mane's path to slot home. When the half-time whistle went, with the Reds in yellow 2-0 up, a new club-record of 19th first halves without conceding had been set. Start revving the open-top bus.

Konate was also involved in the third goal, but this time reluctantly as he miskicked a clearance to allow Darwin Nunez to pull a goal back. The 22-year-old Uruguayan looks like a top-class no9 in the making, but then so does a 25-year-old Colombian by the name of Luis Diaz.

His status as an ex-Porto player stung the home fans all the more when he raced onto Naby Keita's ball, rounded the goalie and slotted home to restore Liverpool's two-goal cushion. It later transpired that some home fans had thrown lighters at Diaz and Robertson. "Maybe it will help them stop smoking," quipped Robbo. "Take the positives."

Alisson took the Standard Chartered player-of-the-month award for March and ahead of the Premier League trip to the Etihad to face Man City, the manager revealed he had a fully-fit squad: "When I looked last time on my smartphone, it looked like everyone is available again." Mad how he checks Twitter for Liverpool team news as well, eh?

Such was the hype around City v Liverpool that it somehow seemed impossible the match could live up to it. "This is the first time the two best teams in England are the two best





teams in the world, led by the two greatest coaches of their generation," said Jamie Carragher, forgetting that Liverpool used to play Liverpool Reserves in pre-season when Bill Shankly was in charge.

To be fair, the stats backed up Carra's claim. Since the start of the 2018/19 campaign, Manchester City had accumulated 338 points, Liverpool 337. And during the previous four seasons the two sides had posted the four biggest seasonal points tallies of all-time; 100 (Man City, 2017/18), 99 (Liverpool, 2019/20), 98 (Man City, 2018/19) and 97 (Liverpool, 2018/19). Somebody get the head-exploding emoji out.

A win for the Reds would leave the title race in their hands, anything else and it would be City's to lose. So a 2-2 draw suited the Cityzens better, but on the balance of play a 2-2 draw suited Liverpool better. In an exhilarating yet exhausting encounter that aged everyone without the need of a Snapchat filter, the Reds were far from their best in the first half but rode the storm and twice came back, ending the Mancunians' 100 per cent record when scoring first in the Premier League this season.

Kevin de Bruyne's deflected effort gave City an early lead, Jota levelled after Robertson and Alexander-Arnold combined to set him up. Gabriel Jesus fired in off the underside of the crossbar to give Pep Guardiola's men a 2-1 advantage, but the second half had barely started when Salah sent Mane through to equalise.

The best chance to win it, after Raheem Sterling had a goal disallowed for offside, fell to Riyad Mahrez in stoppage-time, but he tried to chip Alisson after cutting in from the right and sent the ball sailing harmlessly over.

"It says a lot about us that we've got that slight disappointment to not come here and win," said Trent afterwards. "It was very important for us not to lose this game. We're still in a decent position, but it is in their hands. Hopefully this time around they'll drop a few points."

So with the big game of the month out of the way it was now simply a case of playing Benfica again in the Champions League quarter-final, Man City again in the FA Cup semi-final and then Man United and Everton at Anfield in the Premier League. Crikey. And if you had to pick one game not to win, it was the one game Liverpool didn't win.

Ahead of Liverpool 3 Benfica 3, a Kop mosaic in memory of the 97 was held aloft and the front cover of the matchday programme also paid tribute to those we lost in 1989. The 33rd anniversary of Hillsborough, falling two days after the Benfica match, was also on Klopp's mind.

"For those who lost loved ones in this awful disaster, the pain will never diminish," he wrote in his programme notes. "For those who were there, who themselves were hurt or injured – or even witnessed the horror – they can never eradicate those feelings. So we must continue to support them and observe this anniversary in a manner which honours the memory of those we lost."

On the pitch it was pure entertainment as a much-changed Reds side went 3-1 up in their 400th European game and then got the deckchairs out too close to the sea.

Konate enjoyed opening the scoring against Benfica so much that he did it again, this time from a corner from Tsimi, Tsimi, Tsimi, our Kostas Tsimikas, but Goncalo Ramos equalised with a fine finish.

Two second-half strikes from Roberto Firimino – Jota





and Tsimikas again with the assists – seemed to have finished Benfica off. But with Van Dijk rested, Liverpool's high defensive line wasn't quite in sync and both Roman Yaremchuk and Nunez ran through to score, VAR overturning two offside flags.

Had Alisson not then made a superb save to prevent Nunez making it 4-3 to Benfica we could have been in for a bottom-twitching finale, but thankfully Liverpool saw the game out and with Villarreal shocking Bayern Munich (winning 2-1 on aggregate when you've only had two shots on target in 180 minutes is quite a feat) 'The Yellow Submarine' would be heading to Anfield in the semi-final.

Speaking of semis, we're all going to Wemberlee. But not on the train. It seems they don't run trains to London at Easter so Liverpudlians and Mancunians alike had to get to Wembley by road, some travelling on the free coaches put on by the FA. For those in Red it was totally worth it.

Never mind Man City 2 Liverpool 3, the Reds were so good in the first half that it would've finished HS2 Liverpool 3 if the trains had been on.

Goalscoring sensation Konate got things underway in the ninth minute with his third headed goal from a corner in four games, Robbo providing the assist. Then came a moment that has been waiting to happen for a week.

At the Etihad the previous weekend, Ederson dallied with the ball at his feet for too long and had to clear it off his goal-line as Jota slid in. In goal for City at Wembley was Zack Steffen, and when he dithered with the ball at his feet for too long Mane charged in at pace and scored with a sliding tackle.

It was a mad moment, maybe Liverpool's maddest Wembley goal of all, and the noise from the travelling Kop afterwards was off the scale. As Oleksandr Zinchenko prepared to take a 22nd-minute throw-in, all that could be seen behind him was a sea of scarf-twirling, bouncing Reds singing Allez Allez Allez like Wembley had never heard it before.

"The Liverpool fans are celebrating as if they've won this already," said BBC co-commentator Martin Keown. "Bedlam," added commentator Steve Wilson who, to his absolute credit, had earlier called out those in the City end who'd chanted through an abandoned minute's silence for the 97. The club later issued an apology.

It was bedlam in the Wembley concourse at half-time too as in the 45th minute Mane volleyed home a third goal after some truly world-class build-up play between Alexander-Arnold and Thiago.

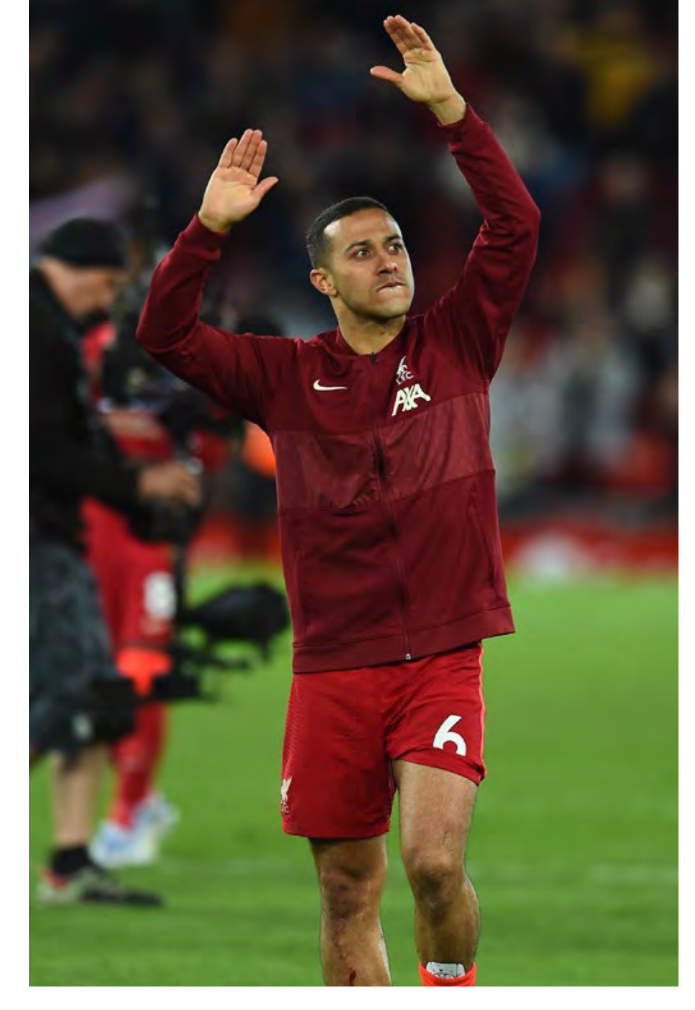
Jack Grealish got a goal back, Alisson saved twice from Jesus and a 90th-minute goal from Bernardo Silva made for a nervy stoppage-time, but City couldn't get a third. The celebrations continued all the way back up to Liverpool with video footage from the Watford Gap services making it look like an Anfield stadium concourse.

Chelsea also made it through to the final the following day, but there was no time to ponder any trophy-lifting possibilities as Manchester's second team were due at Anfield in the Premier League.

Joking aside, it felt like a 1990s role-reversal from when Liverpool were trying to stop United winning trophies when we had little to play for, and that made them dangerous opponents on paper. But not on grass.









Liverpool 4 Manchester United 0. Glorious. And the Redmen played some of their best football of the entire season. It wasn't quite the 5-0 v Nottingham Forest in 1988 as they were better opponents at the time, but it was damn good.

You'll have seen the feature on this game, and what followed against Everton, elsewhere in this magazine, but let's have some appreciation for Thiago here.

Some of the difficult passes the Spanish playmaker made look easy were outrageous – up there with anything Jan Molby, Steven Gerrard or Xabi Alonso produced – but it wasn't just his 96 per cent pass completion ratio that caught the eye.

Thiago ran, he tackled, he anticipated, he intercepted, he bossed the midfield. The *Liverpool Echo* awarded him 10/10 for his display. Anything less would have deserved a full inquiry by Sue Gray. He wasn't the only one on fire either.

"The football Liverpool have delivered here is absolutely sublime. The quality – that pass from Mane, that touch from Salah and that finish – is world-class," said, er, Gary Neville after Mo added to Luis Diaz's opener.

Anfield crackled with noise, Ian Callaghan received a half-time presentation to mark his 80th birthday, and Mane equalled Ryan Giggs' total of 109 Premier League goals (in 374 fewer appearances) when he stroked home goal number three before the Redmen declared at 4-0 after Salah got another.

Again, the game was marred by Hillsborough chants from some in the away end. Such things, and those who sing them, have no place in football.

The 240th Merseyside derby, played on the same day Liverpool Women lifted the Championship trophy at Prenton Park, wasn't as easy.

Relegation-haunted Everton came for a scrap and made the first half so stop-start that Stuart Attwell might as well have had a giant lollipop and hi-vis vest as well as his whistle. The ball was in play for less than half-an-hour and frustrations were boiling over with blatant time-wasting and whataboutery on display. So fair play to the Reds for rising above it and winning the second half 2-0.

Robbo and the GOAT, Divock Origi, got the goals, but going straight into Merseyside derby folklore was Alisson who sent Anfield into raptures of laughter when he easily clutched Richarlison's late shot before mockingly going down onto the turf, mimicking Jordan Pickford's first-half time-wasting antics.

There was no question that Liverpool deserved to win and the same can be said of the first leg of the Champions League semi-final against Villarreal, which also finished 2-0.

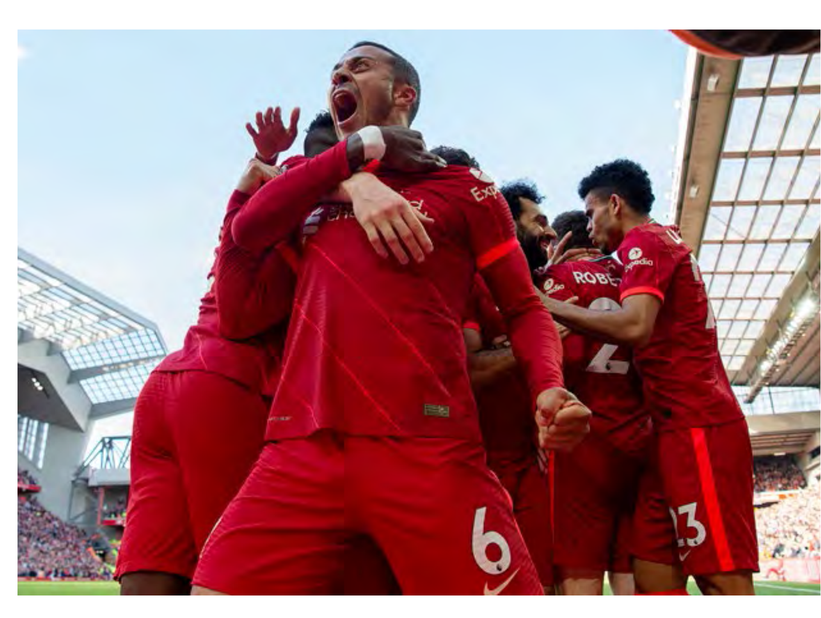
Villarreal's amazing supporters looked resplendent in yellow in the away end, had flags paying tribute to the 97, held their scarves aloft and sang along to *You'll Never Walk Alone* and backed their punching-above-their-weight team to the hilt. Why can't all visiting fans be so classy? And how good was Liverpool's Beatles-themed programme cover? Shout-out to our very own Colin Sumpter for that design.

In the first half Unai Emery's men dug in to go into the interval level after Thiago hit the bar, but two goals in two second-half minutes had the Redmen half-way to Paris.

Henderson's cross clipped Pervis Estupinan and looped over goalie Geronimo Rulli for the opener and, with Anfied abuzz and Villarreal rocking, Mane latched onto Salah's pass to grab a second.

Only an offside flag denied Robertson a brilliant third goal, but a 2-0 lead to take to Spain against a side who'd beaten Juventus 3-0 in Turin and seen off Bayern Munich wasn't to be sniffed at. It was also a club-record ninth European win of the season, but only if you exclude qualifiers. So we have.

That night a rumour started. Klopp might sign a new contract, whispered those ITK. He might not go back to









Germany in 2024 after all. We didn't have to wait long to discover it was far more than a rumour.

The following day, Jürgen Klopp signed a new contract to extend his stay at Liverpool until 2026. Assistant Pep Lijnders and Peter Krawietz also penned new deals. What a bit of business by FSG.

Don't know about you, but this writer did three fist-pumps accompanied by cheers in the back kitchen when he heard it was confirmed, although it's probably better with 12,000 Kopites doing it back at you rather than a bemused cat thinking WTF (where's the food)?

Salah must have been thinking where's the space on the sideboard a day later when he was announced as the 2021/22 Football Writers' Footballer of the Year, becoming only the third Red after Kenny Dalglish and John Barnes to win it twice.

If he wants another Premier League winners' medal in the collection, the Reds needed to end April with another win at in-form Newcastle to keep the pressure on City, and in a tricky-looking 12.30pm tussle they did precisely that.

Liverpool's high defensive line worked like a dream, catching the Magpies offside a season-record nine times, and at the other end a perfectly-timed James Milner tackle allowed Henderson to find Keita. After a one-two with Jota he waltzed past Newcastle goalie Martin Dubravka and fired the ball between a couple of barcodes on the goal-line.

Naby lad's finish was enough to earn three more precious points, although only nine saves by Dubravka stopped Liverpool from racking up the goals with the 1-0 scoreline the minimum their performance deserved.

So, April 2022 was a month when the Reds' Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup hopes could all have ended. Instead it was a month when the prospects of winning an unprecedented quadruple, a treble or a double greatly increased.

Not only did the boys in Red deal with the pressure, they embraced it and could maybe, just maybe, make May 2022 the greatest footballing month any Liverpool supporter has ever lived...



WHAT'S ON

MAY / JUNE





WEMBLEY, ST MARY'S, ANFIELD AND PARIS!

The business-end of the season will certainly be that with the Reds hoping to crown a gruelling campaign by writing themselves into the history books. The final fortnight of a season, which will see the team play in all 63 of the possible fixtures available to them at the start, begins with a third trip of 2022 to Wembley on Saturday 14 May.

Liverpool will play in the FA Cup final for the first time in a decade and will go in pursuit of the club's men's 50th major trophy when they meet Chelsea, aiming for a repeat of their Carabao Cup triumph over Thomas Tuchel's men back in February.

The last couple of games of the Premier League season will see Jürgen Klopp's men aiming to maintain their title challenge until the final day. They visit Southampton on Tuesday 17 May before signing off at home to Wolves on what they hope will be a very special afternoon in front of their own supporters in L4.

Klopp and his squad will then have that rarest of luxuries: a whole six days to prepare for the UEFA Champions League final at the Stade de France in Paris.

Liverpool will meet Real Madrid when they contest the final for the third time in five years and will be looking to bring 'Old Big Ears' home for a magnificent seventh occasion by replicating their 1981 triumph over *Los Blancos* in the French capital.

MAY / JUNE

WHAT'S ON



LEGENDS OF THE NORTH

Liverpool FC Legends will be aiming to bounce back from their 2-1 defeat by Barca Legends in March (left) when they make the short trip to Old Trafford on Saturday 21 May.

The 'Legends of the North' fixture will see the Reds coming up against a United squad that is set to include ex-Red Devils favourites such as Bryan Robson and Dimitar Berbatov.

Look out for further information regarding the Liverpool FC Legends squad and the event's ticket details on liverpoolfc.com.

ALL THOSE YEARS AGO...



ANNIVERSARIES

3 years since being crowned champions of Europe for the sixth time on 1 June 2019.
17 years since the Miracle of Istanbul, against Milan, on 25/26 May 2005.
38 years since Liverpool claimed their fourth European Cup on 30 May 1984.
41 years since Alan Kennedy gave us European Cup no3 on 27 May 1981.
44 years since Liverpool claimed their second European Cup on 10 May 1978.
45 years since Liverpool claimed their first European Cup on 25 May 1977.

And it's 130 years since Liverpool Football Club was born on 3 June 1892...

Liverpool Football Club will celebrate a special birthday when it turns 130 years old this summer. LFC museum curator Stephen Done explains: "People often think the club was formed on 15 March but it wasn't. That date is incredibly important because it was the day Everton Football Club, as we now know it, booted out the people who became Liverpool Football Club.

That was the critical moment when Everton broke up – but not when Liverpool Football Club was born."

After the concept of LFC was taken on by John Houlding, owner of Anfield, and key figures such as John McKenna and William Barclay, in practical terms the club still had to be registered and funding put in place.

On 3 June 1892 the Board of Trade sent a certificate saying that the club formally constituted a company and could now trade.

Stephen continues: "The birth certificate we have for the new football club that would play at Anfield says that Liverpool FC was born on 3 June, which you can just make out at the bottom of the photograph."

The club is planning several events to mark the occasion throughout the coming year and an update to the official alternative history book *LFC 130 Years* is due to be published in June.

BIRTHDAYS

Brad Friedel 51 on 18 May
Howard Gayle 64 on 18 May
Jimmy Case 68 on 18 May
Torben Piechnik 59 on 21 May
Joe Gomez 25 on 23 May
Vladimir Smicer 49 on 24 May
Ibrahima Konate 23 on 25 May
Steven Gerrard 42 on 30 May
Mark Lawrenson 65 on 2 June
Mark Walters 58 on 2 June
Meikayla Moore 26 on 4 June
Javier Mascherano 38 on 8 June





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KIDS HOME STADIUM SHORT 22/23
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HOME SOCK 22/23
£14.95



MENS HOME STADIUM SHORT 22/23
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NEIL MELLOR

Another Champions League final for Liverpool and whatever happens, we'll be talking about this team for years to come

For Liverpool to reach three Champions League finals in five seasons is incredible, but this is the level the current team is at. Jürgen Klopp's men have consistently shown they are one of the best teams in Europe and are genuine contenders to win the European Cup every season.

They are performing to levels where they can genuinely win it again by beating Real Madrid in Paris.

When Jürgen arrived at Anfield in 2015, Barcelona and Real Madrid were seen as the best two clubs in Europe. Now, because of Jürgen and Pep Guardiola, and what has happened in the Premier League between Liverpool and Manchester City, I think the Reds and City are what Real Madrid and Barcelona were. That is where modern football is at.

There will always be an appeal to Barca and Real, but the two best teams at the moment are Liverpool and City. Yes, Carlo Ancelotti's side scraped through to Paris, but they will be well-aware of the quality Liverpool have.

We'll be talking about this group of Liverpool players for years to come and it has been a real squad effort to get to Paris with 28 players used, eleven of them scoring goals.

I believe that if you are to achieve anything in football you need all of your squad. Going back to my playing days, when we won the Champions League in 2005, some players made a big contribution to winning it, others had smaller parts to play, but to achieve such success you have to be in an environment where everybody knows what is required when you represent Liverpool.

That is what Jürgen has built. He's got everybody performing at the required levels and it must be a great environment to be around at the AXA Training Centre as despite not playing regularly, players still come in and show the right attitude and quality.

Liverpool won ten of their 12 Champions League games to get to Paris, including all six away, and while some rivals fans say things like 'They only had to beat Benfica and Villarreal to get to the final', nobody should forget the Reds were drawn in the so-called 'group of death' and earned these results while challenging for the Premier League and reaching two domestic cup finals.

The round of 16, the quarter-final and semi-final games all came before or after big Premier League games. To raise your levels again when you've got so many big matches deserves huge credit.

Real Madrid stand between Liverpool and a seventh European Cup and they're a top side, but we owe them one from 2018 when Mo Salah got injured and Loris Karius was in goal.

Liverpool are a much better team now and I'm not convinced Real Madrid are better than they were then, but they have the quality and match-winners to beat anybody – even when things are against them, as PSG, Chelsea and Manchester City discovered.

In Karim Benzema they also have one of world football's best centre-forwards. He scores a variety of goals, leads the line, is an absolute handful, is experienced, a leader and scores a lot of goals, but is under-valued by some.

People talk about Mbappe, Lewandowski and Salah, but Benzema consistently shows he is one of the best centre-forwards in the world and will be the biggest danger to Liverpool.

Real Madrid play a style of football that will give Liverpool chances, but they will create chances too and whoever is clinical on the night will win.

That said, I think the timing is good for Liverpool as it comes the weekend after the final Premier League game, not three weeks afterwards like it was for Madrid 2019. The players will still be at it and competition for places will keep them on their toes.

If everyone is fit you could probably name nine of Liverpool's starting XI with Ibrahima Konate and Joel Matip competing to play at centre-back and three from five upfront. Does he start Mo Salah, Luis Diaz and Sadio Mane? Does Bobby Firmino come back in? And then there's Diogo Jota.

What a problem to have and it is exactly what the manager will have wanted because he has quality starters and quality options on the bench.

Ultimately, if Liverpool show the intensity they've shown all season, show the mentality they've shown all season and take their chances when they come along they will be Champions of Europe...but if they don't we know that Real Madrid probably will.

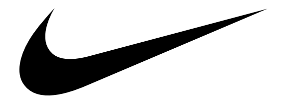
It promises to be a brilliant final between two of football's biggest clubs and hopefully one that helps to make this one of the greatest seasons in Liverpool's history.

• Follow Neil on Twitter @NeilMellor33


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